

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER, 2025

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

DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services and honourable K.K. Lal.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move: That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 6th November, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

A very good morning to all honourable Members on our final sitting day for this week. To our guests in the gallery and those joining us via broadcast and online platforms, we appreciate your presence and your commitment to being part of this ongoing journey. Thank you for staying connected and engaged in the workings of your Parliament.

Honourable Members, I would like you to join me in welcoming the Year 3 students of Nausori Primary School, who are accompanied by their teachers and parents. We welcome you all to Parliament this morning, and we hope that you will learn a little bit more about what your Parliament is about and how it works. *Nu bula maleka.*

Request for Extension – Special Committee on the Sugar Industry

Honourable Members, I wish to inform the House that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 18th July this year, the Special Committee on the Sugar Industry was to have reported back to Parliament at this November Sitting.

The Office of the Speaker has received a request for an extension of time, to allow the Special Committee to complete its mandated work before it can report back to Parliament at a later sitting. Since no Member has opposed the granting of extension, accordingly, as resolved, the extension of time is hereby granted, and the Special Committee will report back at a later sitting.

Review of Membership – Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Honourable Members, in light of the recent developments within Cabinet this week, it has

become necessary to review the membership of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, to ensure our compliance with Standing Order 114(2).

The Office of the Speaker has now received confirmation from the honourable Government Whip that honourable Manoa Kamikamica will now replace honourable Esrom Immanuel on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and this takes effect from Monday, 10th November, 2025.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, our first Oral Question for today, please, kindly note that Oral Question No. 195 of 2025 has been withdrawn by honourable Hem Chand as it has been addressed during the Committee Report debate on Tuesday.

New Measures by FSC for All Sugar Mills (Question No. 243/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the new measures being implemented by Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) to enhance the fire prevention systems, operational contingency planning, and disaster resilience infrastructure in all the sugar mills?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Member for this question. Following the lessons learnt from the unfortunate fire incident at Rarawai Mill, earlier this year, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) has undertaken a comprehensive review in strengthening its fire prevention systems, operational contingency plans and disaster resilience infrastructure across all the three Mills - Labasa, Lautoka and Rarawai.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to remind this august House that we are dealing with a 140 year old infrastructure. Many of its technologies are long obsolete, and without continuous preventive maintenance and modernisation, the risk of failure and incidents will always remain. These measures are being implemented at both the corporate and mill levels, ensuring that all facilities operate under a unified safety, risk management, and disaster preparedness framework that aligns with local industrial standards.

Madam Deputy Speaker, allow me to outline the corporate level measures being implemented by FSC. At the corporate level, the Risk Management Unit now leads a coordinated organisation-wide approach to strengthen disaster resilience and fire preparedness across all Mills. This includes:

- (1) conducting routine risk assessments and hazard identification, particularly in high-risk zones and around vulnerable equipment;
- (2) implementing stricter controls on hot-work permits to minimise ignition risks;
- (3) introducing a standardised incident register to record all incidents, investigations and corrective actions for accountability and learning; and
- (4) integrating fire safety upgrades into FSC's capital expenditure (CAPEX) programme - beginning with the modernisation of diesel fire pump systems and other safety critical infrastructure at the Rarawai Mill.

These measures ensure that a consistent safety framework is maintained across all FSC operations.

The FSC has taken significant steps to strengthen fire prevention, operational safety and disaster resilience across all the three Mills - Labasa, Lautoka and Rarawai, drawing on elements of international industrial safety standards. While FSC has yet to reach full international compliance, it is progressively aligning its systems and practices to these standards through the following key measures:

- prevention and preparedness;
- routine risk assessments;
- hydrant and sprinkler maintenance; and
- hot work permit controls are now standard procedures implemented at all Mills.

On infrastructure and equipment, Mills are equipped with dedicated fire water network, electric and diesel-powered pumps, and strategically positioned hydrants and extinguishers.

On training and response capability, Fire Wardens and in-house firefighting teams undergo regular training and drills, conducted in collaboration with the National Fire Authority (NFA). Implementation of permit to work systems and incident registers ensure operational accountability and learning from each event.

On the inspection and continuous improvement, all Mills are subjected to annual inspections by NFA, with internal audits now being conducted to track progress towards stronger compliance and resilience benchmarks. Madam Deputy Speaker, these measures mark a significant improvement.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- What is your problem? What is your problem? First, you ask the question, so listen to me!

(Laughter)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order! Please, address the Chair.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- These measures mark a significant improvement in FSC's overall risk management culture and demonstrate a strong commitment by this Government to ensure that all our Mills evolve towards a safer, more resilient and internationally aligned operations.

After the fire of September 2025, FSC has reviewed its operational contingency plans for each Mill. Madam Deputy Speaker, each Mill now operates under a site specific emergency response plan to ensure a rapid, safe, and coordinated response to any incident.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- No confidence!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You are a kid man!

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- At Labasa, a factory-wide siren is activated in case of any fire events for emergency to activate the factory evacuation plan. Mock drills are conducted to test the response time and readiness. This is supported by backup electric and diesel water pumps and a freshwater

pond supply to maintain firefighting capacity during power outage. Additionally, disaster contingency plans, for flood and cyclone, are available and are regularly reviewed and tested.

At the Lautoka mill, a comprehensive disaster contingency plan is now expanded to include a detailed response protocol for floods, cyclone and other natural hazards – is firmly in place, and the plan is regularly reviewed, tested through simulation exercises, and updated to ensure operational readiness and minimal disruption in crushing activities.

At the Rarawai Mill, a comprehensive disaster contingency plan covering fire, flood and cyclone scenarios is in place and justified to ensure operational readiness. All incidents are systematically recorded in a dedicated safety register and corrective measures are implemented following each investigation to strengthen preventive actions and continuous improvement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these measures are not just mere procedural reforms, but they are bold, decisive actions that have minimised production disruptions, protected the livelihoods of workers and strengthened FSC's resilience and recovery capacity in the face of adversity.

The fire incident at Rarawai Mill was a moment of reckoning for the industry. It has provided hard but valuable lessons that have driven a renewed commitment to risk management, accountability, and operational excellence across all our Mills. Through these efforts, FSC is now embedding a new culture of safety, discipline and preparedness - one that will define the future of the sugar industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the systems and infrastructure being rebuilt today stand as a testament to this Government's determination, that the tragedy at Rarawai will never be repeated. Our sugar mill infrastructures will rise stronger, safer, smarter and more resilient to fires, floods and disasters of any kind.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me assure this august House that my Ministry will continue to maintain strict oversight, ensuring that every improvement made today delivers lasting accountability, sustainability and confidence in the sugar industry for generations to come.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You do not have a party!

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, a supplementary question; given the recent fire at the Rarawai Mill and also in regards to the safety of FSC workers, can the honourable Minister inform whether regular trainings were, or are provided for all FSC workers at the three Mills?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I am sorry honourable Pillay but would you mind repeating that question, please.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, given the recent fire at Rarawai Mill and for the safety of the FSC workers, whether regular OHS trainings were, or are given to all the workers in the three Mills?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, we do have regular trainings.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for his response. Has the investigation revealed that the Ba Fire Brigade was ill equipped to deal with the fire?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, first of all, we have not received the report from the NFA. We are still waiting for the report, so, unless and until we get the reports, we will not be able to tell what had happened.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, for the Minister in his speech to respond to me and say that I am a “kid,” should I say that he is “old enough” and he does not know what is happening in his Ministry? You are undermining the...

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Members, address the Chair. These things are very, very close to me right now. This is your last warning!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not small children. Children can come to Parliament...

(Honourable Member interjects)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- ...and ask serious questions to Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the question to the honourable Minister is, can he admit that it is an act of negligence by his Ministry when it came to the fire in Ba, because what was seen from the video, was when the fire started there was bagasse all over the ground and then led to the major fire. So, this is an act of negligence from his Ministry. Can he admit that?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- We will allow one last supplementary question after this reply.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, you expect a Minister to be sitting there, in the FSC compound for 24 hours? That is not my job! My job is to...

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Address the Chair, honourable Minister.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- My job is to make policies for the Government.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the question to the honourable Minister is with respect to the disaster resilience infrastructure in all the sugar Mills. I thank him for his comments on the question.

My question is currently with respect to the Mills that are standing, is there any physical work going on within those structures immediately because we have an impending cyclone season in terms of the infrastructure and strengthening it?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have said earlier, we have 140 year old mills. The building structure on one side, which is mostly collapsing, on the other side, we have the machines which are not efficient. Yes, we are very concerned about it and we have two different teams - one is taking care of the building site and the other one is taking care of the machines at this stage.

Fiji's National Priorities Ahead of COP 30
(Question No. 244/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on Fiji's National Priorities ahead of COP30?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; I wish to begin my response by acknowledging the devastation suffered by the people of Jamaica, Haiti, the Bahamas and Cuba, in the wake of *TC Melissa* last week. This storm, one of the most powerful ever recorded in the Caribbean, is yet another stern reminder that no nation, large or small, is immune from the worsening impacts of climate change.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is precisely why COP30 in Belem, Brazil, is not just another meeting, it is a defining moment for Fiji, for our Pacific region, and for all vulnerable nations fighting for survival. Without our voice and the collective voice of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the global response to climate crisis would fail to account for those of us who are most affected, but least responsible.

Our persistent engagement in international negotiations has secured critical milestones for the world, including the Paris Agreement and its legally binding obligations for countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to keep the temperature within 1.5 degrees Celsius, which is a threshold that determines our very survival as Pacific peoples.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the reality reflected in the latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) is sobering. The current global commitments put us on a path towards more than 2.4 degrees celsius of warming, which is far beyond what our ecosystems, economies and communities can withstand. COP30 must, therefore, serve as a moment, of course, to -correct the world's trajectory and demand that ambition matches the urgency of science.

Madam Deputy Speaker, last week, Cabinet endorsed Fiji's national priorities for COP30, following extensive work by our multi-agency Technical Working Group (TWG). This group includes representatives from the central Ministries, regional organisations, academia, youth, civil society and indigenous leaders. It reflects our belief that climate action must be inclusive, people-centred and anchored in the realities of those on the frontlines.

Fiji will take forward three key priorities, and they are as follows:

- (1) NDCs that parties must submit before COP30 are the most consequential in history. They will determine whether we will still keep 1.5 alive.

The synthesis report shows that major emitters are far off track. Fiji will not accept any NDC outcome that undermines 1.5 degree celsius limit. We are, therefore, calling for an NDC response plan at COP30, which will be a global roadmap that propels parties with weak commitments to revise and resubmit more ambitious NDCs by 2026. This plan, Madam Deputy Speaker, must also provide clear accountability measures and financial pathways for developing countries to implement their commitments.

Fiji's own third NDC, endorsed by Cabinet and launched last week, expands our mitigation and adaptation ambition. It also includes ocean-based targets, renewable energy targets and

the various types of community resilience programmes. It demonstrates the seriousness with which Fiji takes its own obligations, even as a small emitter. We will also push to operationalise the Just Transition Work Programme and embed it across all finance mechanisms, ensuring that the shift away from fossil fuels is fair, inclusive and adequately funded.

- (2) COP30 must deliver on the adaptation negotiation items. Parties must agree on a robust package of indicators for the global goal on adaptation and endorse a new adaptation finance goal to support implementation. It is imperative that we have the necessary finance to create a viable pathway towards climate resilience.

Furthermore, we will be working constructively with our partners to further refine and operationalise the new institutions and entities established to support national response to climate-induced loss and damage. Fiji has also played a long-term leadership role in the effort to enable global response to loss and damage and directly involve the design and operationalisation of the Fund for responding to loss and damage. As a result, Fiji has been nominated by the COP30 Presidency to co-chair the negotiation process that will produce guidance to the new Loss and Damage Fund.

Madam Deputy Speaker, here in Fiji, we are doing our part to navigate the complexities of the international finance system by unlocking scale and prioritising innovation with a new approach that empowers national implementation. However, we need the international community to do their part. The operationalisation of the COP29 decision on the new collective quantifiable goal on climate finance through a roadmap and commitments that not only recognises the special circumstances of Small Island Developing States, but delivers tangible progress in terms of scale, access and predictability.

- (3) Our third top-level priority for COP30 is ocean climate action. Fiji is honoured to be co-facilitating the Ocean and Climate Dialogue in 2026. At COP30, we must highlight the importance of ocean-based action across climate negotiations. Recent science suggests that a tipping point has been reached, and that continued ocean warming, even at current levels, could lead to the collapse of coral reefs within our lifetime.

As large ocean States, our economies, cultures, and identities are tied to the health of our marine environment. The protection and sustainable use of our ocean must, therefore, be central to climate action. We are leading in this space, as Fiji's third NDC integrates ocean-based targets and our national climate legislation recognises the ocean as a vital part of our climate response.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in addition to these high-level priorities, Fiji will be engaging across all 14 thematic agenda areas at COP30. Our national position is reinforced by the 2025 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which confirmed that States have a legal obligation to prevent climate-induced harm consistent with the 1.5 degrees celsius limit. This provides moral legal weight to our call for accountability and ambition.

Madam Deputy Speaker, success at the COP30 will not be easy. We face a world divided by conflict and inequality, but our moral compass remains clear. The IPCC has warned that this is the final decade to secure a livable future. So, COP30 is, therefore, our generation's test of leadership and justice. We will go to Belem with unity, clarity and resolve. We will speak not just as a delegation, but as a voice of the region, of the people and of humanity's conscience.

We must speak for the fishermen in Kadavu, whose coastal fisheries is hampered by the impacts of biodiversity loss; the farmer in Ba, whose crops get affected by the intense cyclones every year; and every child in the Pacific who deserves to grow up on their ancestral land. The world expects action. The public demands it. At COP30, Fiji will ensure the world not only listens, but acts.

We also acknowledge the presence of the Parliament delegation that will also be in Belem, and we will see to it that we will work together in those 68 events that we will be attending, all those side events, and we will ensure that it will be by petition as we are going into Belem, as in Fiji.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to highlight, I saw you trying to grab the cards. The noise that is coming from this side, is actually from the cheering squad behind me, led by honourable Niudamu. I wanted to remind him, that there is no more Cabinet positions that is available. Even if it is available, it has to go to the Assistant Ministers from PAP

I thank the honourable Minister for his statement and his concentration on oceans. Oceans being a valuable content of COP - as ocean absorbs 90 percent of the heat, and 25 percent of carbon dioxide. I understand that now, he will address oceans in the next COP meeting. However, I wanted to ask him on how he has been addressing oceans in the previous COPs?

I wanted to suggest also that the Ministry of Fisheries is quite important in the discussion on oceans, and I suggest that they take the honourable Minister for Fisheries in the next COP.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Any supplementary questions?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Response to honourable Koroilavesau.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I thought you had a supplementary question.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- He had a supplementary question. The response to him.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Oh yes! Sure. Go ahead, honourable Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No, Madam Deputy Speaker, what I am saying is – the question came from Opposition, so, the honourable Minister needs to respond before I can.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Oh! I am sorry, because you went on and on about the cards and so forth. I got distracted. Thank you, honourable Maharaj, for the reminder.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish that the honourable Maharaj would ask his question, then I can answer both. But again, the simple question as suggested by the honourable Koroilavesau, we are working very closely with the Ministry of Fisheries on oceans. There is a Technical Working Group between the two Ministries, and be rest assured, that Fisheries also will be represented in our three priorities of moving into oceans for the next COP, and we will ensure that all these options that need to be there, especially our negotiators, will be part of the delegation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank my classmate and congratulate him for leading the delegation to COP, and as a good classmate, I do not want any questions asked to him for which he does not have the answer.

In the previous sitting, I did ask him on what his Ministry is doing with regards to the diesel generators that are using high density fuel being installed by EFL, and they continue to do so. I do

not want this to be at a foreign meeting where he is actually asked about a domestic question, and he does not have an answer. So, if he can actually update Parliament on what his Ministry has done to stop EFL from installing high density fuel generators that are causing a lot of carbon emissions into the environment?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I am going to make my ruling. It is a new question, and honourable Maharaj, I suggest that you put that into the Business Committee for them to consider in the next sitting.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think it is important to ask now, rather than when the delegation comes back and then people start criticising. If the honourable Minister can inform the august House on the size of the delegation, and whether it will be funded by the taxpayers or the donor agencies? Secondly, my colleague who is the Minister for Climate Change now, if he can inform this august House on how committed is the developed countries in assisting the developing countries?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I heard two questions there. Honourable Bala which would you prefer, first or second?

HON. P.K. BALA.- I will take the first question.

(Laughter)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank my good friend, a seasoned politician, honourable Bala, for the question. Our delegation includes 22 technical negotiators and four Ministerial representatives. We will ensure that Fiji's interests are covered under those 14 agenda areas. For the information of honourable Bala and also members of the public, 75 percent of the funding is external, and only 25 percent is from Head 50. That is to answer your question.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you very much honourable Bulitavu, and I wish the Fiji delegation to COP30 a very, very good outing in Belem. I hope all of you are going to be taking your running shoes because you will need them.

Family Care Leave and Paternity Leave
(Question No. 245/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations update Parliament on whether the Ministry will reconsider the Family Care Leave and Paternity Leave that were removed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to inform this august House that the Coalition Government has taken proactive steps to ensure that the rights and welfare of our workers and employers, continue to be strengthened and safeguarded through proper legislative reforms.

Briefly as part of the background, the Family Care leave of five working days was introduced in Fiji through the 2018-2019 Employment Relations Budget Amendment Act, announced through the National Budget, and there is a bit of background to it, Madam Deputy Speaker. Teachers in this country were accorded three days of compassionate leave, teachers only amongst the entire civil service - the reason for that was, that teachers annual leave is during the school holidays, and they have no other leave that they can take to attend to urgent family matters. So, these three days were

there since I started teaching in 1973, and this was suddenly taken away some time in 2015. My colleagues who were teachers on the other side will remember. That was when the Fiji Teachers Union, of which I was the General Secretary, took this matter to the High Court to challenge it, and before the court could make a decision on this in 2018, this sudden announcement came.

There was no due process followed, there was no erupt and there was no tripartite consultation. The employers were all taken by surprise. Of course, they did not utter a word against it, they could not object because they were too frightened - that is the background of it. This was just like the one percent that was taken away from them and they could not say anything about it.

That was how the unilateral decision was made, and subsequent to that, it was reduced to two days in the 2020 Employment Amendment Act and then later, through the Employment Relations Budget Amendment in 2021, it was reduced to one day. Then on the 1st April 2022, the family care leave provision was removed completely due to COVID-19. The Coalition Government has included the provision of three working days of family care leave in the proposed Employment Relations Bill of 2025, which is currently before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for consideration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the reintroduction of family care leave provision under the proposed review is part of an ongoing effort to strengthen workers' rights, improve work-life balance, and whilst taking full cognisance of the employers' concerns in ensuring that the leave is not abused.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the draft law provides workers with the right to take up to three working days of family care leave. However, it is important to note that this leave is for the care of immediate family members and those residing in the same household. So, that is a restriction that has been put in place so that there is no abuse. This is also because of the submissions and concerns that were raised by the employers during our consultations on the draft bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for now, the paternity leave is not part of the draft law and will not be introduced in the coming amendment. As I have said earlier, similar amendments were made to the draft Bill after listening to the various stakeholders through our consultations. So that is where it is.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister is speaking about proactive measures, but I can see the family care leave was reduced from five to two days, and the paternity leave was completely removed. So, where is the proactive measures which he is talking about?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, perhaps at the expense of repeating. I have stated that we have gone through consultations on these provisions with the stakeholders, including the employers and workers' organisations and the general public. After the feedback we have received, after the concerns of the employers and workers' organisations, we have balanced it and we are reintroducing the three days of family care leave.

HON. H. CHAND.- Honourable Minister has just informed the august House, that in 2015 there was a compassionate leave for teachers and that was removed. I want to ask the honourable Minister, are there plans to bring that compassionate leave back for teachers? The family care leave and compassionate leave, these are two different types of leaves because Family Care Leave is for the care of immediate family members.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as the honourable Member would be aware, the General Orders actually govern the terms and conditions of work of the civil servants and it will have to be directed to the relevant Ministry.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I really like and enjoy the way the honourable Minister always tries to manoeuvre his answer. I have one minute.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The way he tries to portray about the previous administration, always, in every question, he will try to slip that in.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister informed that there was a huge cry when the compassionate leave of three days was removed. How can he now justify the removal of three days in the Family Care Leave and that all the employees and employers are happy with the two days that is given by this administration, but the five days that was given by the previous administration, people were unhappy with the three days compassionate leave that was removed. At that point in time, they were very unhappy with the previous administration but now, bringing from five to two, just because this Government is bringing it in, employees are happy. How can he justify that?

(Honourable Members interject)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Members, can we listen to the answer, please?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, somehow, he misheard me. I said, “three days” of Family Care Leave, not two days! The rationale behind the three days is that compassionate leave was given for three days. That is the rationale.

I have just said that we have listened to the employers because when they decided the five days, even they were not aware! It was announced by the then Minister for Economy, no one was aware. No consultation! They did not even know. It was just announced like that, and the employers, we talk to them now.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we talk to them everyday. They said that they were completely taken by surprise. They were shocked, but they could not say anything. Like everyone else, they could not say anything. So, that is the rationale.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please be, advised that the Office of the Speaker has received notification of the withdrawal of Question No. 246/2025. We will proceed to the next question.

(Question No. 246/2025 withdrawn)

Update on Completion of Road - Drue, Kadavu.
(Question No. 247/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on what plans does Government have to complete the road to Drue in Kadavu?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank honourable Usamate for that question regarding road development in the Province of Kadavu.

Currently, Drue Village in Kadavu is only accessible by boat. The previous Government had planned the construction of a new road from Namara Road to Drue Village, and consultations were conducted at that time. It was agreed that the Commissioner's Office would undertake the earth works, while the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) would handle the construction of the road pavements, et cetera.

However, I wish to advise that to date, no construction work has commenced on the proposed road. We are further scoping and assessing, and that will be undertaken by the end of this year on that road. I would like to assure this august House that FRA and Public Works Department intend to include this road project in the 2026-2027 Budget. Should we secure funding support earlier, this project will be prioritised accordingly.

The Government remains steadfast in its commitment in enhancing infrastructure and improving accessibility in Kadavu. Of course, as we already mentioned, in our Regional Development Centres in the Maritime, we will continue to prioritise. I would like to take this opportunity to also update Parliament on the Kadavu Roads.

The Vunisea to Vacalea access road spanning 7.8 kilometres from Vunisei to Soso has been completed. Further, the extension from Soso to Vacalea, covering 24 kilometres, has seen the clearing, earthworks and drainage works completed. The remaining works scheduled for the coming financial year include the design and construction of the new Jioma Crossing, as well as full pavement construction of the entire 24 kilometre stretch.

The total investment by Government for these specific routes is around \$9.9 billion. Further, to this the Government is looking into the upgrading of the community access routes, as already suggested by the other side of the august House, including Dravuwalu Village access, school access and the church access, Vukavu Village access, Niudua Village access, Jioma Village access, Nacomoto Village access, Kadavu Koro Village access and Yavitu Village access. These improvements will also enhance market access for farmers, allowing them to efficiently transport their produce to markets and, of course, with other services including health and education.

Sealing preparation works, in addition to what I mentioned, are also underway. Approximately 4.1 kilometres of road base is being prepared for sealing, covering key locations within Vunisea, such as the Vunisea Jetty, Government Station roads, hospitals, airports and surrounding villages including Namalata, Namuana and beyond. An allocation of \$3.3 million has been made for this work. Mobilisation is planned to roll out in February 2026. Additionally, FRA has put forward works programme to seal village frontages along the main road corridor to enhance local resilience and safety.

Looking ahead, the FRA has several important projects planned. A comprehensive scoping study for Yawe Stage 2, with a budget of \$1.2 million, is currently being conducted with the EIA. Screening is expected to conclude in January 2026, and works are expected to commence in March 2026.

The coastal protection works along Nabukelevu Road has been scoped with rock riprap construction and an allocation of \$0.8 million has been budgeted, and work is expected to commence early in the first quarter of next year. The FRA continues to conduct extensive consultation with the landowner and rural communities to encourage participation in small works contracts, focussed on vegetation control.

To date, two applications have been received from Kadavu and we are progressing through the contractual arrangements. Together, we are also facilitating landowner participation in terms of aggregates and quarry. The FRA has completed the installation of solar lights at Vunisea Jetty, Kavala Jetty and Luvea Landing recently, last month, which has greatly contributed to ensuring safety and reliability for passengers.

The Government continues to put in place strategies to ensure safety and efficiency at our port of entries for our seafarers. The infrastructure improvements are expected to bring significant socio-economic benefits and enhance economic participation for our maritime communities and, of course, better facilitate not only for locals but also in terms of tourism.

With those words, I thank the honourable Member for the question and before I sit down, I would like to wish the Flying Fijians all the best in their game against England in this weekend.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for his very extensive reply, and I am glad to see that the sealing works is also about to begin in Vunisea. Just one aspect of the work in Vunisea, the jetty down to Naluvea. I am glad to see that there are solar lights, as that is the jetty that feeds the Baba Ceva. Will FRA be also responsible for that road that goes from the Vunisea Government Station down to the Naluvea Jetty because I am not too sure whether it is part of FRA's normal operations?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The short answer is, yes, that definitely will be included.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it is nearly 10.30 a.m. and I am going to adjourn the House for morning tea. We will come back in half an hour's time.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Committee resumed at 11.05 a.m.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- As we begin this morning, honourable Members, please join me in welcoming the Chairman and the Members of the Kabara Tikina Council. Welcome to your Parliament, Sir.

Status of Pending Applications - Appointment of JPs
(Question No. 248/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General inform Parliament on the status of pending applications for the appointment of Justices of the Peace?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- As of today, Fiji has a total of 673 Justices of Peace (JPs). Between January 2025 and 31st July of this year, the Ministry of Justice has received 80 applications for JP appointments. There will be a swearing in, in the month of December for about 30 other new JPs.

Given the important role JPs play in supporting the justice system, serving the communities, it is essential that we conduct a thorough and transparent vetting process. This process naturally requires time to ensure all applicants meet the required status of integrity, competence, and community standing.

As of October 2025, a total of 38 applicants have been interviewed, with 33 from Central Division, 2 from Western Division, 3 from Northern Division. The remaining 42 applications, 7 in the Central Division, 32 in the Western Division, and 3 in the Northern Division, are scheduled to be interviewed this month.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to also acknowledge the presence of the JP from Mudu, Koro - Tevita, who is sitting in the gallery and is doing a wonderful job, doing JP service, not only in Koro, but also when he comes to Suva, comes to our office to attend to the members of the public who come. I also urge the honourable Minister for iTaukei and the honourable Minister for Regional Development, in terms of their offices, to apply for JP services so that the people out in the maritime areas can be assisted.

Yesterday I received a call from a police officer in Kadavu. Apparently the summon, they have to come back to Suva to issue a new summon because there was no JP in Vanuabalavu. I urge MPs, in your respective areas, you can liaise with people who you believe could be good candidates for JPs, so that they can provide the service that is so central in the daily lives of our community.

Interviews are conducted by two Executive Officers who are based in Suva. These officers travel to the Western, Northern regions to carry out interviews to ensure equal access and consistency in the selection process. Following the completion of the interview process, and under the advice of the High Court, an induction and swearing-in ceremony for successful applicants is scheduled to take place in February of next year. Also note that under the law, all MPs are JPs. I am liaising with my Permanent Secretary so that MPs could be sworn in in their role as JPs. The Ministry of Justice remains committed to ensuring that the appointment process of Justice of Peace continues to be fair, credible and merit-based, reflecting the high standard expected of individuals who serve in the public.

The Ministry of Justice has a new JP Allowance Policy, Allowance Policy in place that has been trialled for the first batch of payments made last month to 103 non-civil servants JPs. We will

review the policy within the next 6 months to determine the number of civil servants who are JPs and whose peers have been recognised for their service provision, and that their service provision does not impact the delivery of daily service as per their role as civil servants.

The Minister of Justice continue to remind all JPs to please submit all the requirements to enable payment of the \$100 a month JP allowance. The complete forms must be submitted to the Ministry of Justice, and upon verification, payment will be made to the JPs. We continue to impress upon all JPs that they must act with integrity, fairness, justice and within the rule of law for the critical community service that they provide.

In the last Parliamentary session under honourable Maharaj asked about the context of the JPs, it is already on the website. All you have to do is click on www.justice.gov.fj and we have indicated the JP, where they are located and in what division.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, we do understand that the JPs provide a very important service to our citizens and the honourable Minister has stated that anyone who is interested can make an application. I would like to ask the honourable Minister whether any assessment has been conducted to establish the total number of JPs needed in the country? Just like in Parliament, we know exactly how many MPs are needed, so similarly, have you conducted any assessment? Do you have a figure to say that these are the number of JPs we need in the country?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the data speaks for itself for the number of JPs in Western, in the maritime and of course, if there are more JPs and there are applications received within that locality, then applications will not be granted. It is on a need-to-know basis. Right now, we are trying to focus on the rural areas as the figures there are high in the Western Division, especially in the Indian community, they are very active in this.

The problem seems to be with the *iTaukei*. The service is there, but they really do not know how to go about it. The data speaks for itself and in some localities, we will not grant any further JPs because it is a sanctuary.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Minister, my question is actually in two folds. The number that you gave of 673 is that inclusive of the 55 MPs as we know there is eligibility. The minute you get appointed as a Member of Parliament, you automatically become a JP. Is it included in that number of 673? Secondly, is a Member of Parliament permitted to put MP next to his name? Is he permitted? Because it is not an application process, it is an automatic process to write JP after the MP?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- As I had stated, I am trying to liaise with my Permanent Secretary, who is away in the islands. It was discussed, but I cannot recall a ceremony where the MPs were present. That is why they are currently not in the 673 list.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the second part of the question, this is again for purposes of whatever documents, if an MP does sign, is he permitted to put JP or does the word MP cover his JP status when witnessing documents?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Yes, I believe after they have been signed as JP, they can just put MP but it is also important because there is a separate legislature that governs JP. So, MP and JP.

VAT Collection from Meat Suppliers
(Question No. 249/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament as to why the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service continued to collect VAT from meat suppliers when, under section 2 of the Value Added Tax Act 1991, meat suppliers qualify as produce suppliers and are exempt from VAT until the amendment on 1st August, 2025?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Member's statement is not correct. The Value Added Tax (VAT) exemption for produce suppliers under section 2 of the VAT Act has always remained in place. This exemption continues to apply to those who are directly engaged in the production of primary produce, that is, farmers, fishermen and those involved directly in meat farming, such as poultry and cattle farmers. These genuine producers remain exempt from VAT on the supply of their produce and has always been the case. What changed effectively on 1st August 2025 through the recent Budget Amendment was not the removal of this exemption, but rather a clarification of its scope.

The amendment was necessary to make it clear that middlemen, whether individuals or businesses, who purchase produce, including meat from farmers and then sell, are not considered produce suppliers under the VAT Act. For example, a butcher who buys meat from a cattle farmer and sells it to consumers or retailers is not engaged in primary production. Such businesses add value or act as resellers and therefore they are required to charge and account for VAT in the normal way.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will read section 2 of the Principal Act as amended in the definition of produce supplier by deleting and substituting the following:

“Produce supplier means a person who is directly engaged in the cultivation, harvest or farming of produce and in the course of furtherance of all taxable activities carried on by the person, supplies produced and supply of that produce constitute at least 90 percent of that persons total value of supplies and the balance of goods and services supplied by that person is produced but not in a raw and unprocessed state, provided that any such person shall not cease to be a produce supplier as a consequence thereof.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, this clarification was made to ensure fairness and consistency in the application of VAT across the supply chain. That is to prevent misuse of the produce supplier exemption and to protect legitimate farmers and producers who continue to enjoy the VAT exemption provided for under the law.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am not sure if I am incorrect in saying this, but it is something that has to be clarified because produce supply, et cetera, there are exemptions that have been given to these particular suppliers who are currently being charged retrospectively. Why are they being charged retrospectively?

We understand the legislation that we passed on the 1st August, but section 2, the definition is very different. They were given exemptions by the very institution that he is talking about from many, many moons ago. This is why they never charge a VAT. Now, they are all lumbered with a

million dollars, \$900,000, \$800,000, because FRCS is saying that they need to pay that, and retrospectively.

My question is, will you have a look at this and see if it can be resolved? These are three of the major suppliers in the country that are now being lumbered with huge amounts of VAT that they need to pay. They do not have an issue with paying from here on in. Will you look at that, honourable Minister?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Member, you are a lawyer and you understand the situation. That Act is supreme in this case. If they think otherwise, there are processes to follow. If you say some exemptions are there, probably we are not aware. For the information of the House, I think this issue has been brought up by two or a few of those butcher meat suppliers who had not been compliant. All other operators have already been compliant and charging VAT is required by law.

Pacific Regional Tripartite Employment Conference
(Question No. 250/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations update Parliament on the recent Pacific Regional Tripartite Employment Conference held in Nadi in September 2025?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to update the House on the successful 25th Pacific Tripartite Employment Conference, which was held from 1st to 4th September at the Crowne Plaza, Wailoaloa in Nadi. First and foremost, I wish to sincerely acknowledge and thank the honourable Prime Minister for graciously officiating this high-level event, which showcased Fiji's strong leadership and steadfast commitment to promoting decent work, social dialogue and regional cooperation across the Pacific.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Conference was hosted by the Fiji Government through my Ministry in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, and it brought together Pacific ILO member States through the participation of Labour Ministers, Senior Labour officials, workers and employers' representatives from across the nine Pacific Island nations, development partners and other key stakeholders.

The Conference, themed *Designing for Disruption, Conference on Decent Work, Climate Change and Security — celebrating 50 years of ILO in the Pacific*, provided a vital platform for Government, employers and workers organisations to come together and discuss key regional labour challenges, share best practices and develop strategies to promote decent work, fair employment practices and workplace resilience across the Pacific. The event also celebrated the ILO's 50 years of service in the Pacific. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the ILO Office for the Pacific, which is based here in Suva, for their unwavering dedication over the past 50 years in advancing decent work, labour rights and social justice.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Conference provided a platform for delegates to discuss key labour and employment issues, with international, regional and national speakers sharing insights and best practices. Discussions focused on decent work and job creation, labour mobility, worker protection, workplace safety, gender equality, youth employment, policy alignment and sustainable development with special attention to emerging sectors such as the green economy, digital industries and the blue economy. The event also emphasised capacity building and knowledge

sharing, producing practical strategies and collaborative solutions to strengthen labour markets, improve worker welfare and promote safe, inclusive, and sustainable employment across the Pacific.

At the Conference, a special separate session was organised for Labour Ministers for their support and endorsement of the establishment of the Pacific Senior Labour Officials Forum. It mandated labour ministries to nominate senior representatives aligned and guide the forum with the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy, supported by Fiji.

The outcome of the Labour Ministers meeting was conveyed to the employers' organisations through the Pacific Island Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO) and the workers organisation through the Pacific Island Council of Trade Unions (PICTU). They both participated actively in the conference.

Following the endorsement of the Pacific Tripartite members, the original Conference resolution and the outcome adopted at the Conference have been committed as follows, the:

- establishment of a labour ministers meeting as an annual regional gathering, recognising under the Pacific Islands Forum architecture;
- establishment of the Senior Labour Officials Working Group and Talanoa Forum; and
- establishment of the enabling secretariat support of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat.

Following the Conference, the Ministry promptly communicated the resolution and outcome of the conference to the Honourable Prime Minister, who presented them at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS) meeting, which was held in the Solomon Islands in the second week of September, to form part of the PIFS regional review architecture. This also formed part of the communique to the other Pacific Island States and the honourable Prime Minister was supported by the Pacific Island leaders at the PIFS meeting.

Madam Deputy Speaker, again, I wish to sincerely thank the honourable Prime Minister as the Head of the Government, for the support on this milestone achievement, as well as other Pacific Island leaders for their commitment towards decent work and social justice in the Pacific. This will also assist us in strengthening tripartism in the entire Pacific SIDS.

The Conference not only endorsed the resolution of the key outcomes but also marked Fiji's efforts to strengthen regional cooperation. Fiji has taken the initiative to pursue proposed bilateral partnerships with three Pacific Island countries to provide technical assistance on labour standards, occupational health and safety, workers' compensation, mediation and productivity enhancement.

My Ministry will continue to work closely with our tripartite partners and regional counterparts to implement the employment conference resolution and outcome and align it to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the ILO decent work agenda.

Legal and Land Rights Disputes - Mt Kasi Exploration Project
(Question No. 251/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the current legal and land rights disputes between the Government, the landowners and the companies interested in restarting mining operations in relation to the Mt Kasi

exploration project?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I updated this House in April on the progress of Mount Kasi operation, and I acknowledge the interest that this House has on the progress at Kasi as well as the wider public interest that it generates. However, I must reiterate to this House, and also to the public that the Mount Kasi project, currently, is a mineral exploration project and is not a mining operation.

This licence or SPL was awarded to Vatukoula Gold Mine Limited (VGML) after a very competitive tender process in December 2020. I am not sure who it was from the other side of the House who was Minister for Lands at the time, it may have been the honourable Usamate or the honourable Koya, one of the two, but when I assumed office in 2022 and early 2023, before paying a visit to Mount Kasi to visit with the landowners, I reviewed the tender process, just to make sure that everything had been ticked and all the boxes had been attended to. It was my opinion and the opinion of those who were around me that everything that needed to be attended to had been attended to by the committee that assisted the Minister in providing the award. Further to that, so the rights to undertake the mineral exploration within the Mount Kasi prospect was granted to Vatukoula Gold Mine under SPL No. 1519 on 20th June, 2024 and SPL is for a period of three years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in relation to the dispute, I can confirm that for the past 16 months, the VGML was unable to commence its proposed exploration work. The delay was due to some opposition that was evident on the ground with some members of the landowning unit, and they have been lobbying (it is common knowledge) for a company of their preference, a company that also had applied in the tender process in 2020. I, myself was part of a few meetings with the landowning unit in the past 16 months, and I am pleased, Madam Deputy Speaker, to update Parliament today on the significant and positive development that has happened very recently.

The Ministry, as we have always made sure, was our posture in attempting to resolve conflict or conflict situations. We have continued to liaise, continued to talk to landowning units, the landowning unit in Kasi and that has culminated in a very significant ceremony that I myself have attended in the last two months in the village of Dawara, where the chiefs were present, the landowning unit was present, the *Turaga ni Mataqali* of Naveitokaki was also present and we exchanged what is traditionally the approach that we usually take to make sure that we resolve conflicts. We take it that the gestures that we had afforded to the landowning units, and them to Government as goodwill of the development plans that Government and the landowning unit will be able to go forward with together during the exploration process, and hopefully in the mining phase of it.

The acceptance, Madam Deputy Speaker, heralds a historic moment of co-operation between the Government and the landowning unit in Kasi. We have to understand the context around the opposition or the hesitation because Kasi was, of course, one of the operations that had been mined in the past, and also we have had some very significant incidences in Kasi where fish have died in the river at Yanawai. So, when we talk about mining in Kasi, there is a lot of negativity that comes with it, when we refer to history. But these are some of the things that we make sure that in the exploration phase that is going to be undertaken by VGML in the future, will accommodate those concerns and those reservations by the landowning unit.

As we speak, Madam Deputy Speaker, Vatukoula Gold Mine is now directly engaging with the land-owning units on the modality that they would prefer, that they would sign off on, and the co-operation and participation within the framework of the SPL that has been issued. The chief of Yanawai and his people, I am told, have gone to Vatukoula twice, or two groups have gone to Vatukoula to have a look at the mining operation in Vatukoula, and they have gone back to Yanawai,

and so we have left it with the land-owning unit and the company to design between themselves, what is the modality of co-operation that they want to enter into in the exploration phase.

I am confident that there is positivity now arising out of this engagement and personally, for me, is a blessing indeed to advance the prospectus in Mount Kasi because, as I said here on the last occasion, it has the capacity to create new jobs if it is going to graduate into a mining. I made reference to the young mine in Tuvatu in Sabeto, which now currently employs just over 450 local employees from around the Sabeto area, Nadi, Lautoka up to Ba, with a monthly cash flow amongst the 465 new employees of just over \$600,000 every fortnight. These are some of the things that the Government is looking at, engineering this new industry that is going to bring a new air of confidence into Wailevu in as much as it is going to bring new confidence of investment around the Savusavu area.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for his comprehensive answer. The Natural Resources Committee made a visit to this site, and we have seen a huge possibility - the resources are there and around the thick forests which can be explored as well. Can the honourable Minister inform us what lessons has the Ministry learnt from this, in comparison to the other mining projects in Fiji and how is it going to resolve this?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- I am going to try and answer that question in the way as I understand it. Of course, different parts of Fiji will present different sets of challenges. As I said in my last address on the matter, that as far as Kasi is concerned, we are looking at learning of the back of experiences in Vatukoula as well as in Tuvatu. I mentioned the last time I was here and I did mention this as well at the village hall in Yanawai, that if we are going to be learning from the experiences in the two mines that exist in Viti Levu, take Tuvatu for example, they run an overhead of just about \$6 million a month, which means logistics, food supply, laundry and the support services that support the mining activity.

We are looking at modality to be developed with the Kasi people, the local population of supplying that logistical support services that say, for example, is being shared out here in the operation in Tuvatu to be contained within the local community in and around Wailevu. So that whilst the mining is happening, and it does graduate into a mining, new employment is going to be created, new businesses are also going to be created, new opportunities are going to be created, if we learn of the two operations in Viti Levu, we can expand and improve the one in Mount Kasi.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Opposition said, and I quote, "*We Fijians are rich in resources but empty in pockets,*" which is very true because while exploring Mount Kasi, I have seen huge potential. I hope that when the honourable Minister visits Mount Kasi, he not only explores, but talks to the people about how other resources can be used and how the other parts of the land can be utilised. Is the Ministry engaging in this kind of talks with the people or not?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I spoke about the modality that we want to develop in and around the Kasi mining operation when that does happen, which will include provision of farms. There are, of course, 460 people we will have to feed breakfast, lunch and dinner. Someone is going to have to provide for that, so that sort of service, we want to make sure that it is contained in-house, contained in and around the area and the villagers that would be able to support that operation in Kasi.

Transport is something that will need to be provided for. It is not a mining operation *per se*. Mining companies would give that offer to somebody else. We can ask the landowning unit to start looking at opportunities where they themselves will purchase trucks and vehicles that will start

provide that to the mining company.

Laundry services - miners would come in the morning, pick up fresh clothes, go down to the mine, come back up, and drop off those clothes. Someone is going to have to provide laundry services for that. In Nadi, it is picked up from Tuvatu, taken to a laundry service provider in Nadi Town, then it is brought back afresh. In Kasi, I would imagine it would be too far to be taken to Savusavu and brought back, so the creation of that service, just close to the mine can be something that the Soqosoqo Vakamarama of Yanawai might be interested in looking at.

So, these sorts of modalities, we are looking at closely within the Ministry so that we can support the ongoing discussions that is happening between the company and the landowning unit. The idea is, as quite rightly pointed out by honourable Kumar, is if we say to ourselves that we are resource-rich, at some point, that richness has got to translate into your bank account and that is something that we want to make sure is going to happen in Kasi as we learn of the two operations here in Viti Levu.

Written Question

Government Grants to Higher Education Institutions (Question No. 252/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the criteria used to allocate Government grants to higher education institutions?

¹HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I submit my response in accordance with the Standing Order.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that the written response to the Written Question asked by honourable Premila Kumar (Question No. 204/2025) has been received and I thank the honourable Prime Minister for his written response. This will be conveyed to honourable Premila Kumar and uploaded as well on the Parliament's website.

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have four End of Week Statements. Each member may speak for up to 10 minutes with a 10-minute response by the honourable Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required, and there will be no other debate.

Economic Progress, Social Cohesion and Security

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my end-of-week statement is with respect to economic progress, social cohesion, and security. Let me just begin by saying when the Coalition Government took office in 2022, it inherited a nation that despite global shocks of the pandemic, stood on firm economic foundations. There was stability, there was investor confidence, and a clear path to recovery. Three years later that foundation has been shaken somewhat by indecision, inconsistency, et cetera. We have actually seen regression in the economy.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 252/2025, tabled by the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Deputy Speaker, what we see today, as I said, is a regression. The cost of living has soared, investment confidence has actually declined, and ordinary Fijians are struggling to make ends meet. Families that once managed to survive are now sinking under rising food prices, utility costs, and an economy that no longer reward hard work. For all their talk about change and people first, the Coalition Government has failed to deliver any coherent economic plan.

The policies lack direction, there is a lack of unity, and the decisions, or lack thereof, have created uncertainty that hurts businesses and investors alike. The hard cold truth is that economic progress is impossible without social cohesion and national confidence. Today, our people are getting more and more divided.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Today, as I said, our people are getting more and more divided, our community is more uncertain, and our national unity has become more fragile than ever. I am not on social media. The Government has spent more time blaming the past, blaming others, rather than building solutions, and more time in internal conflict than in national service.

Now, I just wanted to quickly just add to that particular portion. When you excessively and disingenuously blame a past government, it is actually a deflection of your current responsibilities. This has actually eroded public trust and faith in you. You are actually suffering from a policy stalemate, and you do it time and time again to try and win an argument rather than solve the problems.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We have witnessed that right throughout our parliamentary sessions. It is back and forth. Do not try and win the argument. Solve the problem. Get on with it. Get on with the good governance that is needed. Scapegoats for you have become your inefficiencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji cannot afford a government that governs through trial and error. We need a government that understands economic management. We need a government that respects institutions. We need a government that listens to the people.

(Chorus of interjections)

Let me just say in this honourable House and everybody in Fiji, that one word that commonly comes out of them is hogwash and hypocrisy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is alright, but they are not even creative enough to find another word. Those two words came out of honourable Usamate, yet they use it, just like they use all the policies and everything that they have opened belong to the previous government that was in place.

HON. MEMBER.- Hogwash!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It reminds me, there you go. Now we are learning a lot, going on and on every day.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just remind them of a very famous comic, it is actually the Phantom comics, and there was a particular line that was used when in those Phantom comics is all

the ghost who walks. There is a ghost who walks around there, and that is the FijiFirst government ghost that walks around that they are scared of still even though it does not exist anymore.

Deputy Speaker, until all of these problems are resolved loudly, firmly and fearlessly for all the Fijian families, they will feel abandoned by this particular Government. While the Coalition Government continues to stumble on a daily basis, the Opposition remains ready to assist at any time with purpose, unity and with a vision grounded in real progress. Over the past years, I give credit where credit is due, Fiji's economic trajectory has been marked by promise and potential, but now sadly it is marked by uncertainty.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please! Carry on, honourable Koya, please.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Now, sadly, there is uncertainty and poor management. This is not us saying it as politicians. You just go out to the public, and they will say the same thing. Whilst successive governments have claimed progress, the lived reality for ordinary Fijians tells a different story. Economic progress is not measured by political slogans or photo opportunities. It is measured by stability. It is measured by productivity. It is measured by jobs. It is measured by growth that reaches the grassroots. What we state today is a fragile economy. The rebound that has occurred in our economy is based on one thing alone tourism. Tourism is what actually saves this country day on day and without that we are nothing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, their trajectory started post-COVID. The foundation laid between 2014 to 2021 was one of fiscal discipline, robust infrastructure development is strong...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That was in 2019.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Robust infrastructure development and strong institutions designed to make Fiji an attractive hub for business and for investment. It was a time that Fiji had a clear direction over policies that were predictable, and the private sector thrived because Government policy was guided by certainty and not by confusion. The economic progress cannot be divorced from social cohesion and security. A divided society cannot prosper, yet what we witness now is an increasingly polarised nation where politics is driven by personality and not by principle.

The Government's lack of unity and coordination has filtered into its policy paralysis. Ministries actually contradict each other, and legislation is rushed without impact analysis. We see that here on a daily basis and long-term economic strategy has been replaced by short-term political appeasement and we will see more of that in the next 12 months.

Madam Deputy Speaker, equally concerning is the decline in institutional integrity of independent bodies that once operated on merit and professionalism, are now weighed down by indecision. Yes, they groan and moan because they are the ones who are creating this problem. Our national institutions meant to safeguard the people's trust are being weakened by politics.

HON. M.S.M. KAMIKAMICA.- interjects.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, security too extends beyond policing our streets. It is about securing our economy. It is about securing our social fabric. True national security lies in ensuring food security, energy security, job security. When people are economically stable, socially united and trust their government, a nation becomes secure from within. It is actually time to try and restore the confidence. They have 12 months to try and restore some confidence.

There is an investment pipeline that was spoken of, which everyone is waiting for it to be open completely, so that we can actually see the benefit. No one is scoring a score on what you are not bringing, but the pipeline does not just consist of your work, it also is from previously.

Lastly, before I finish, Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of judicial independence, judicial independence stands at the heart of our nation's security and our stability. Judicial independence stands at the heart of our nation's security, and our stability. That is something that must be paramount, whether you are on this side or on that side. I am glad that there is agreement that is the cornerstone of our future. Investors, once justice prevails, contracts will be honoured, rights will be protected, people will look at the institution and say, "Yes, I can do business in Fiji." A strong and independent judiciary is not merely a legal safeguard, it is an economic and a social stabiliser.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for Fiji's long-term peace and prosperity, it must depend heavily on the judiciary. It must be respected, it must be insulated from all politics, because justice must be guaranteed as a security for the people. I know I have very little time.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- You have run out of time, honourable Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Just to round off, Madam Deputy Speaker, the three things that I spoke of - economic progress, social cohesion and security - these are the cornerstones of any developing country. I do not pour scorn on what has been done in the last three years but, please, remember, this is our country. It is not just your country; this is our country.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Koya, please, finish up. You are two minutes over.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- When I say 'ours', I mean all of us, every Fijian!

Please, remember that every Fijian looks up to you and every Fijian requires economic progress, social cohesion, security, and requires us to be an undivided nation, for us to be able to present to the rest of the world, how good we are, and what we can do, which they know about, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, listening to honourable Koya, you can hear a lot of hot air, a lot of lies, everything negative, nothing positive! We talked about foundation shaking, just look at the FijiFirst Party, which started with 26 and now, how many? 11?

(Laughter)

Very soon it is going to go down to probably nine or seven? So, do not talk about shaking. Then you talk about regression, cost of living, struggling...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Struggling now!

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- ...but you do not have any data! He does not have any data to give us.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a lot of generalisation coming from that side. I would recommend that next time, you look through the speech and see whether it is good to be factual, to be presented to the august House. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we live in a globally uncertain environment. For the record, some positive things to tell the honourable Member is that tourism is now on record level - the debt has now gone down from 90 percent to under 80 percent.

(Laughter)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Growth projections over three years and it is going to be there for consecutive years.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- We have \$6.1 billion investment pipeline from \$3 billion that you have. So, you should take those into consideration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we live in a globally uncertain environment, nations are grappling with conflicts, trade war amongst major economies, and that has changed the global trading landscape.

On the domestic front, we have our own challenges. As a small island developing economy, our vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters have increased. The restructuring of our labour market with our key neighbouring partners have seen a major loss of people and skills out of Fiji to these countries. We started with limited fiscal space, constrained by the massive debt build up from the previous government.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, when the Government took office in December 2022, we inherited an economy, weakened by years of reckless economic management and borrowing which, of course, was compounded by a pandemic-induced economic and fiscal crisis. Infrastructure had been neglected, the health system was in distress, our water system was in crisis, and our communities were confronting growing social issues, including the rising drug-related problems and spread of HIV. It was there from your time!

(Laughter)

Madam Deputy Speaker, the new government took decisive steps to stabilise the economy and public finances. Our focus has been to renew confidence, restore sustainability, protect the most vulnerable and lay a foundation for long-term growth, as articulated by the National Development Plan.

As I mentioned before, we brought down the debt to GDP ratio from 90 percent. The honourable Leader of the Opposition is laughing there. When we came into government, now it is under 80 percent, and we will continue on this path to reduce those rates.

We are accessing concessional debt from multilateral partners to bring down the cost of debt. We have maintained a low interest rate to support the private sector. Our financial system remains sound and well capitalised. Foreign reserves and liquidity are at an all-time high. Inflation has been in the negative territory for nine consecutive months. I am not sure what honourable Koya mentioned about high cost of living, when the inflation is coming down.

In the last three Budgets, we have implemented a range of targeted measures to support our people. We increased the pay for our civil servants from 7 percent to 20 percent in the 2024-2025

Budget, and another 3 percent in the recent Budget. We raised the minimum wage to \$4, and then \$5 from April 2025.

We have provided three rounds of Back-to-School assistance. We reduced VAT from 15 percent to 12.5 percent in the last Budget, while maintaining zero rate VAT on 22 essential food items to protect the household purchasing power.

We provided a 10 percent bus subsidy for all Fijians. We increased social welfare by 15 percent and 25 percent for those over the age of 70 years. In the Budget, we further increase social welfare by 5 percent, so the total welfare payment is around \$220 million. So, we care for the welfare of our people!

We delivered the highest sugar cane price to our farmers in recent years. We reaffirmed our commitment to rural livelihoods and the sugar industry. The 2024 season was around \$101.13, and 2023 was paid \$105.08. So those are two consecutive years of cane price of over \$100.

We wrote off \$650 million of TELS debt for 53,000 students and replaced the loan scheme with a targeted full scholarship scheme. We increased our funding to the health sector, Water Authority of Fiji, roads, rural development and social services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are not short-term fixes. They are deliberate and strategic actions designed to correct past imbalances and support our people through the years ahead. The results are beginning to show. We are doing well, if you compare us against our neighbours – Australia or New Zealand, as I had mentioned before.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.-Economic confidence is returning. You see the \$6.1 billion investment pipeline, so that is confidence! Fiscal stability is improving and, most importantly, we are creating the conditions for inclusive growth - growth that benefits all ordinary Fijians, not just a few.

Assistance Through the Office of the Prime Minister

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good afternoon to you all.

I rise today to update this august House on the work within the Office of the Prime Minister, specifically the progress, achievements and future direction of the development grant, commonly known as the Small Grants Scheme, which is administered by the Office of the Prime Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative continues to play a critical role in Government's efforts to empower communities, address development priorities, and foster inclusive and sustainable growth across Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Scheme has provided an opportunity for the Office of the Prime Minister to regularly allocate time for us to visit rural communities and to have a feel and hear firsthand the difficulties faced by our rural dwellers. Through these visitations and *talanoa* sessions with communities, immediate needs are normally brought to our attention.

Over the past three years, the grant has become one of the Government's most tangible expression of partnership with the people, by bridging their resource gaps for small, but vital community projects that improve daily lives across Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the programme is designed to provide a targeted financial assistance for community- based schools and institutional projects that directly improve their livelihoods and strengthen service delivery and promote economic empowerment.

Since its inception, the scheme has operated under one clear principle, that development must be people-centred and driven by the needs of the communities themselves.

Madam Deputy Speaker, between 2023 and 2025, a total of \$5 million was allocated under the Small Grants Scheme. During this period, the office of the Prime Minister successfully implemented 184 projects across all the four Divisions, benefiting over 2,000 livelihoods nationwide. The projects are distributed as follows:

- (1) Central Division - 94 projects with a total investment of \$1,741,000;
- (2) Eastern Division - 36 projects with a total of \$763,000;
- (3) Northern Division - 31 projects with a value of \$917,000; and
- (4) Western Division - 23 projects with the sum of \$1 million.

These figures reflect an equitable distribution of development support throughout the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Scheme's reach and diversity reflects the varying needs of our communities. Projects implemented through the Scheme have covered a wide range of development priorities, including:

- (1) Educational support through the provision of school furniture, classroom renovations, teacher's quarters and ablution blocks.
- (2) Community infrastructure and development projects, including the construction of foot crossings, access roads and community halls.
- (3) Renewable energy initiatives such as solar installations and solar streetlights.
- (4) Health and sanitation projects, including village dispensaries and water supply systems.
- (5) Economic empowerment initiatives, such as the provision of boats and engines, bakery ovens, chainsaw and brush cutters.
- (6) ICT connectivity, projects, including VSAT and digital assistance.

These projects represent a tangible improvement in the daily lives of Fijians, whether through better education facilities, cleaner water, renewable energy or enhanced community enterprise.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Small Grant Scheme has proven to be one of the most visible and impactful community development mechanisms in Fiji. In the Northern Division, the installation of solar lights has brought about reliable electricity to communities that has never experienced consistent lighting. In the Central and Western Division, assistance for school renovations and furniture has created a safer and more conducive learning environment for students. In the Eastern Division, the provision of boats and engines has improved inter-island mobility, allowing access to education, markets and health facilities. This may appear small, through the lens of mega development initiatives, but their social and economic effects in the communities are immense.

These projects have a profound impact, providing access to basic services, enhancing livelihoods and fostering community resilience. Many rural communities that once lacked clean water or reliable power, now enjoy facilities that uplift their quality of life and support local economic

growth.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a comprehensive review and realignment were implemented on the Small Grant Scheme, which led to the realignment of the project design for small grants. Communities are now encouraged to play a stronger role in project implementation and formulation, and they are expected to pay a partial contribution to the total cost of the projects that they have requested. This shift also supports a broad principle that development must be a partnership between communities and of course, the Government.

What are some of the challenges? Like all development projects, the projects have faced a number of challenges, including logistical constraints in some areas, supply chain and limited capacity within some of the communities. However, these challenges have offered valuable lessons to our staff, so that they can improve the work that they are currently undertaking.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we look ahead, the Government intends to reposition the Small Grant Scheme from being primarily a welfare-orientated scheme to becoming a strategic catalyst for inclusive and resilient community development. This means, placing a strong emphasis on community enterprises, evaluate production, micro and small business enterprises, and local infrastructure that unlocks income-generating opportunities.

The future direction of the Grant will focus on creating sustainable livelihoods through rural enterprises, supporting women and youth groups in entrepreneurship, enhancing community resilience through renewable energy, and providing essential services, which is greatly needed in the rural areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are a lot of grants being provided by Government, and we expect that this Grant provided by the Office of the Prime Minister will also be working much more in synergy with other grants that are being provided by other government agencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Small Grants Scheme continues to stand as a testament to Government's commitment to equitable and inclusive development. It ensures that even the smallest communities from the highlands of Naitasiri to the islands of Lau and Rotuma, are not left behind in Fiji's development journey.

The journey from assistance to empowerment is well underway. The development grant will continue to evolve from funding small community needs to becoming a development catalyst that ignites economic growth and self-reliance across our communities. The words of our development vision embody a government that listens, responds and delivers, working hand-in-hand with our people for progress, prosperity and peace.

With that, I commend this statement to the House.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 35(2), I rise to respond to the Statement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as has been highlighted by the Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, this programme of the Office of the Prime Minister's Small Grant Scheme has touched many people right across the nation. Assistance to community halls, from kitchen utensils to schools, school furniture, solar systems for the halls and schools, even solar streetlights, boat engines and cartridge, bakery ovens for the communities, chainsaws to help in the village building programmes, construction and renovation.

We encourage them when they come to negotiate with the construction and renovation, particularly of community halls and church halls, to include into the concept of community meeting rooms the introduction of drug education and drug awareness education. It could also be temporarily used as a haven for those addicted before they are transported to the main centre in Suva and Viti Levu.

Madam Deputy Speaker, sports equipment for young people is also linked to the development of their community halls. We have all of these, and as honourable Tubuna has highlighted, in the Central Division we have had 94 projects that cost \$1,741,918.37; Eastern Division, 36 projects worth \$768,317.47; the Northern Division, 31 projects costing \$917,835.68, and the Western Division, 23 projects costing \$1,013,945.81. A total of 184 projects at a total cost of \$4.442 million.

We emphasise and encourage communities coming forward to ensure that there is community involvement and community participation. So, the programme works best as a cooperative effort between the Prime Minister's Office or Government and the communities. There is assistance also goes out to infrastructure around the village or in the villages, culvert and foot-crossings, land preparation, water meter projects and so on. I have a water meter project coming up in Tailevu. I am looking forward to being with the people of the village of Burerua, when we go and commission that.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a useful programme, and it is not from Government funds. These are contributions from development partners, that do not go directly into the budget system but are sent and directed to the Prime Minister's Office as Small Grants. It is a Small Grant Scheme administered by the Office of the Prime Minister in response to requests, general requests from members of the Community.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the purpose of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a Suspension Motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, 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 12.30pm today, to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, we still need to complete the End-of-Week Statements, in addition to the Bills that we need to consider today.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the Motion.

If any Member wishes to speak on the Motion, otherwise, I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

Empowering Youth Through Education and Employment

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The honourable Prime Minister, the one and only honourable Deputy Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and all those watching from the comfort of their home; good afternoon to you all.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Governments all over the world have a crucial role, in shaping the future of Generation Z, known as Gen Zs. The young population born after mid-90s and early 2010s, through targeted policies on education and employment.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this generation, which prefers to be called Gen Z, judges leaders not by their words, but by their speed and action. They demand solutions that match their pace of development. They believe they already have answers to many challenges, and often view politicians as their biggest hindrance because we are perceived as talking too much and delivering too little.

Gen Zs expect a government, that not only listens but operates swiftly, to provide practical solutions. Their core expectations of leadership are:

- (1) Collaborate - to work with them, not just for them.
- (2) Engagement - talk to them and discuss issues rather than lecturing or talking on their behalf.
- (3) Listening - truly listen and discuss things with them. Furthermore, when it comes to work, Gen Zs expect their work environment to offer the same comfort, enjoyment and experience at home, moving away from traditional, boring and paper-tinted offices. This is one of the main reasons that Gen Z prefers to be job creators rather than job seekers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a small country like Fiji needs to learn from the two most powerful economies, India and China. They started investing in their youth through start-ups and most of these recognised brand nowadays is a successful story of the start-up policy for Gen Z. Here is a breakdown on how the Government can empower youth and the challenges Gen Z faces, and their likely policy expectations:

- (1) Education empowerment and strategies;
- (2) Quality and access; and
- (3) Investment in quality education through primary and tertiary levels, ensuring access necessary infrastructure like technology, sanitation and learning materials.

Skill-Based Curriculum

Reform curricula to focus on the future-proof skills like digital literacy, critical thinking, problem solving and emotional intelligence, moving beyond purely abstract to theoretical knowledge.

Talent development

Support the nurturing of diverse talents such as art, technical, tech, entrepreneurship trades

rather than focusing solely on traditional professions known as white collar jobs.

Digital Infrastructure

Close the digital divide by investing in affordable, widespread internet access and schools have functional computer labs, empowering youths through technology access. Fiji is now going into 5G, Gen Z expects us to start off with 6G as other countries have already started with.

Career Readiness Integration

Incorporate career exploration, mentorship program, internship and job scheduling into the educational pathway to each transition from school to work.

Madam Deputy Speaker, employment empowerment strategies, job creation and facilitation, implement policies, encourage employers to hire young people and create entry-level positions. This can include tax incentives for sector-specific support.

Entrepreneurship Support

Start entrepreneurship by offering homeland registration, seed funding, mentorship, and running innovation challenges or prizes that focus on social and economic problems.

Skill Training and Upskilling

Fund vocational and technical training programmes that align with the current industry demand, focusing on entrepreneurship and marketability.

Inclusive Hiring Targets

Consider policies that encourage hiring of recent graduates or mandate inclusion of young people in Government roles and boards to give them a seat at the table.

Address Unpaid Internship

Ensure that work experience opportunities are meaningful and financially viable, as reliance on unpaid internships can exclude those from lower-income backgrounds.

Challenges faced by Gen Z

Gen Z is a unique profile shaped by the digital age, economic instability and global crisis.

Economic Insecurity

Facing high inflation costs, cost of living pressures, concerns about student loan debt, where applicable and future ownership.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thanks for bringing that up, honourable Member. Now, let me elaborate on that. If someone wants to convert their scholarship to payment to clear off their bonds, or from bonds to payment. Say for example, the entire process for the scholarship was \$50,000 and he has to serve a bond of three years, if he wants to pay that \$50,000. There is a 50 percent penalty on that \$50,000. So, the student now has to pay \$75,000. Where did that come from? This is not free education. The TELS under the previous administration students had to pay at most 1.5 percent to pay off the loan.

If that loan was paid within the first year, there was a 50 percent reduction. So if you owe \$50,000 you only had to pay \$25,000. Not like what this Government is doing, you take \$50,000 but end up paying \$75,000 if you want to convert bonds into payments. Where is the Free Education?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a letter under the letterhead of TELS and Toppers stating the fact, and it can be tabled in the Parliament to show what this Government is doing. This is one of the reasons, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is one of the reasons why the youths of PAP opt to differ from these politicians sitting here. That is why there is a drift!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- As I say, do what Gen Z wants you to do. Do not start doing things that you think that is appropriate for them. That is why they are being divided.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Hear! Hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker;

- (1) Mental Health Crisis - high reported level of stress, anxiety and depression, often fuelled by constant news consumption and social media pressures.
- (2) Workplace Transition Difficulties - translating theoretical education into practical job skills, high demand or meaningful work, work-life balance and purpose-driven employers, which not all job markets currently provide. Give them a target and a timeline, and they will fulfil it, whether they actually fulfil it from 8.30 to 4.30 or within an hour. That is what Gen Z wants.
- (3) Access and Equity - concerns over healthcare access and affordability, high awareness of personal experience with racial and social inequities.
- (4) Digital overload - while digital natives, they often feel overwhelmed with the constant flow of information and may struggle with maintaining focus or balancing online versus in-person engagement.

Gen Z calls the expectation at the national level, Madam Deputy Speaker. Gen Z tends to be pragmatic, purpose-driven, and has a strong belief that the Government should play an active role in solving major societal problems. Focus on economic stability and affordability policies addressing the cost of living, housing affordability, access to affordable health care, strong Government policies that ensure decent jobs with fair compensation, and opportunities for career advancement.

How can we achieve this? Madam Deputy Speaker, the World Bank just today released that Fiji is growing somewhere at close to around 3 percent, when it should be growing at around 5.7 percent. We left Fiji at the fifth fastest growing economy in this world. This Government has taken it down to three percent and now the World Bank is advocating this particular Government that you need to increase the economic growth if you want to see prosperity for our younger generation.

Mental health prioritisation - national policies that mandate our heavily subsidised, accessible and confidential mental health support in schools, universities and workplaces reduce stigma around mental health issues in public disclosure and policy.

To conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker:

- (1) Climate action and sustainability
Addressing climate change as they often report high levels of climate anxiety. They expect accountability from our leaders and businesses. As I stated earlier, EFL is one of the cases.
- (2) Equity and Inclusion
Stronger national commitment on racial religion and gender equality. They expect this to

be reflected in the educational system and employment practices.

(3) Civic engagement and Transparency

Opportunities for meaningful participation in policy making. They want a voice and expect transparency and accountability from the governing bodies, especially this Government. Education policies emphasise civic culture and financial literacy.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Maharaj for his Statement. When I read the topic, I thought it was going to be a proper statement because if you read the top of the statement, I thought the statement would highlight the importance of educating our people, creating employment, et cetera. They said not to use the word 'hogwash', but it has a lot of nonsense...

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... because there was really nothing constructive in what he was saying. He started off by saying that all politicians are a hindrance. I mean, if you look back, they were the ones who were hindering everyone.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- They were hindering our progress, hindering our political development, hindering everything and 100 percent hindrance. So that was why we as a Government came in, we worked hard to replace their government, and that is why the people made a choice and removed them. If you say politicians are a hindrance, that means all leaders are a hindrance. This is the kind of statement that is coming up from the other side of the House. I am not sure why he said that.

There is another issue he raised, technology access. Honourable Kamikamica, was the honourable Minister in-charge of communications, there has been a lot of developments in terms of technology developments, and we continue to progress that- in terms of connectivity, the expansion of 5G and all those. That has been repeatedly expressed in this House. We are working closely with our development partners and of course this is what our young people need to move forward.

The honourable Member also mentioned mentorship and entrepreneurship. These are parts of this Government's programme through the Ministry of Youth, the Ministry of Trade, in terms of business and commercial developments. There are also programmes in place which this Government has introduced in terms of graduate trainees and apprenticeships. If you have heard my presentations, for example, on Water Authority, there are 50 plus Apprenticeships coming in. Not only that, but we have made sure that these apprenticeships include the water catchment owners, which they have ignored in the last 16 years; they have not done anything in terms of incorporating these water catchment owners. These are the kinds of developments which the other side of the House has not mentioned today.

The cost of living, the honourable Minister of Finance has already alluded to it in terms of the facts about cost of living, the percentage decreased in the last three to six months, but the other side of the House keeps on exaggerating about this issue. The student loan facility this is the government which removed the debt. That is the most important element ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... debt has been removed. However, have you been through

a debt burden or not? The debt burden can physically and psychologically impact a young mind. I mean, you are talking about our young people, our youths, when this debt burden was removed, it is not only physical what is in your accounts, but it is also mentally and emotionally. This Government has really rightened the emotional state of the youth of our country by removing that debt. What honourable Maharaj mentioned is the mechanics of it. For example, those who leave Fiji, because they have not served their bond they still need to pay. That is the reality of it, we cannot just remove all the debt, but of course, those who are in Fiji will apply to them, and those who are not serving their bond there will be some sort of cost recovery in terms of that.

The honourable Member also mentioned health care. A lot of things have been said about our health care, but this Government has made huge steps in ensuring that there is a future funding plan for CWM hospital moving forward. This is in association or in partnership with the Australian government moving forward, not only the refurbishment of the current hospital but also the establishment of a General Referral Hospital. Those are major, major steps moving forward, apart from the facility we are working on with the Indian government in terms of, I think, a cardiac speciality hospital. These are not things which should be dismissed, but in addition to that, there are various other plans. When we plan, we also incorporate the financial plan. That is the most important thing when we move forward. So, it is not only health, but also roads, water, et cetera.

Using Honourable Usamate's words, not hogwash, but he introduced us to another very famous word, 'flabbergasted'. We were absolutely flabbergasted today when Honourable Maharaj stated that under the FijiFirst, it was the fastest-growing economy in the world. I mean, I am just flabbergasted because I know there are other fastest-growing economies in the world, not Fiji under FijiFirst. A lot of what we heard today, it just factually it cannot be verified. It is unverified. So, this is a characteristic. I mean, Honourable Ketan Lal is not here. He is the chief of unverified pronouncements.

So, as we move forward, let us appreciate what has been done. The positives that have been done. I know it is a hard battle in terms of social media, in terms of getting things across, but if we look at the reality of the situation, 90 percent or 95 percent is positive in the last three or four years. The 5 percent which is negative has been blown out of proportion by you and Honourable Ketan Lal. Let us just be realistic. There is a lot of issues, instability and issues of underdevelopment, et cetera, faced around the world, but if you look at Fiji, if you look at the developments, I mean, thank you to you. I am not dismissing anything which is done by the last government. As a responsible government, we build on those successes. We build on it rather than dismiss it, and that is the key thing.

As we move forward, let us work together. Cut out the social media comments because it exaggerates a really small negative thing, like the whole Government is collapsing. It is not collapsing. Nothing is collapsing. Everything is moving forward. We are observing the rule of law. Let us work together in that regard. As we move forward, I wish you well in your request to form a political party. It is good. As a democracy, it is good. Please try to form the political party as soon as possible. The honourable Prime Minister might call the election before the end of this year. Form it quickly.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you very much, honourable Tuisawau, for that reply.

Honourable Members, while you are all smiling and laughing, I think it is time to have a break. We will suspend proceedings for lunch and Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.44 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed further and continue from where we were at our lunch recess, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Deputy Speaker, the honourable Qereqeretabua for presiding over the House proceeding in my absence this morning. The Deputy Speaker has skilfully navigated her way through our Order Paper for today, that except for one last End of Week Statement, I am left with only one last agenda to deal with. So, thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the Year 7 students of Ratu Latianara Memorial School.

(Acclamation)

They are accompanied by their teachers, of course, and we welcome all of you to your Parliament this afternoon. We hope that you will learn a little bit more about what your Parliament stands for and is all about, and what it does.

Legislative Review

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, and honourable Members of Parliament; Fiji stands at a pivotal juncture in its development journey. As the nation grapples with evolving social, economic and environmental challenges, the need to modernise its legislative framework has become increasingly urgent. Many of Fiji's laws, some dating back to the colonial era no longer reflect the realities of contemporary governance, human rights or community aspirations.

Reviewing and reforming outdated legislation is not merely a bureaucratic exercise, it is a strategic imperative to unlock national progress, empower communities and uphold justice. Laws form the foundation of good governance. When they are outdated or misaligned with the current realities, they can slow our progress as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, Fiji's development journey continues to evolve. As new challenges and opportunities arise, it is crucial that our laws reflect the times we live in. Regular review and reform of legislations ensure that we remain up to international standards, fulfil our global and regional commitments and strengthen our institutions to deliver effectively for our people. Regular legislative review is a cornerstone of good governance and is vital for our country to move forward effectively in a rapidly changing world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fostering economic and social development, outdated laws can stifle progress. For example, laws governing factory work from the early industrial era were insufficient to address modern safety standards and working conditions. Regular reviews have enabled the creation of modern employment and health and safety laws that protect workers and promote a productive workforce. Similarly, laws of commerce, intellectual property and data protection must adapt to the digital age. Failure to update these can lead to economic inefficiencies, security vulnerabilities, and loss of investor confidence.

Maintaining the rule of law and the public trust, laws provide the fundamental structure and rules for society to operate. When laws become obsolete, and clear or out of step with contemporary social norms and values, they can lose legitimacy and public respect. Citizens and businesses are more likely to comply with laws they perceive as fair, relevant and consistent. Regular reviews ensure

the law remains relevant, which underpins the rule of law and builds public trust in democratic institutions.

Adapting to new challenges and innovation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, society faces new challenges constantly, from climate change to cyber security threats. The review process allows the legal framework to adapt and respond effectively to these issues. It enables the creation of laws that provide solutions to emerging problems and avoids the pitfalls of trying to apply antiquated legal concepts to entirely new scenarios.

In ensuring efficiency and legal certainty, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a statute book bogged with redundant or contradictory laws creates confusion for the public, lawyers and the judiciary, leading to unnecessary legal costs and operational inefficiencies. Parliament's house cleaning efforts such as statute law streamline the legal system, making it clearer and more accessible. These certainty and clarity is essential for efficient administration and a functioning legal system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament is not merely a lawmaking body, it is a vital engine of legal and social evolution. Its power to scrutinise, amend and repeal outdated legislation is a critical mechanism for preventing stagnation, ensuring that the legal framework facilitates rather than hinders countries movement towards a more just, efficient and prosperous future.

As Members of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we hold the mandate of the people and it is imperative, we as legislators must maintain relevance of laws that affect our people, our economy and most importantly, our sovereignty. At times, we have been swayed, and we have mostly become project managers in this Chamber. I remind this House that we are legislators and, in that context, we make laws, repeal laws and review laws for the betterment of our beloved country and its people.

Fiji has several laws that were established during the colonial era and are now considered outdated as they no longer align with modern societal needs, technological advancements or international standards. Some specific examples are the Public Health Act 1935, which is one of the oldest pieces of legislation currently under comprehensive review. The Fisheries Act 1942 is described as archaic and in dire need of modernisation. The Workers Compensation Reform 1964 is one of the several employment laws of the Ministry where employment has been overhauling because it is considered colonial-based and contains unsuitable clauses that do not fit into the employment trend of today.

The Burial and Cremation Act 1911, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an extremely old law and its provisions require updating to align with modern practises and needs. The Mining Act of 1965 are laws that are rooted in its colonial past and are complex and outdated, requiring extensive consultation for revision to address modern royalty sharing and environmental standards.

The Police Act 1965, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Act, which guided the Fiji Police Force since colonial days, is considered no longer suited to today's rapidly changing crime landscape. The Local Government Act 1972, National Trust of Fiji Act 1970, Markets Act 1940, Moneylenders Act 1938, Patents Act 1879, Pesticides Act 1977, Widows and Orphans Act 1914 and the Quarries Act 1939.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our very own Parliament Powers and Privileges Act of 1965 is an outdated law, and it calls for a review. These are some examples of some of the outdated laws that govern our country. These laws and many others are still being used today and is heavily relied on by our civil service and ministries and even the judiciary to settle cases but are lacking in many ways. In many cases our older laws were drafted under circumstances that no longer reflect today's social, economic and security landscape. Legislative reviews allow us to close gaps, remove duplication and ensure that our policies are relevant and responsive. They also enable us to enhance penalties when

necessary, not to punish but to deter wrongdoing and maintain public order.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, legislative reform also empowers our institutions to perform their mandates with greater clarity and confidence. When laws are clear, consistent and well-aligned with our international obligations, they create a stronger foundation for enforcement, accountability and cooperation both within government and with our development partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reviewing legislation is not merely an administrative exercise. It is about nation building, ensuring that our legal framework supports our people's aspirations and protects the generations to come. It is also a reflection of leadership to recognise when change is needed and to act decisively in the best interests of the nation.

To conclude, some of our archaic laws are being reviewed as we speak, such as the Police Act 1965, which is undergoing a big overhaul to align the Force's operations with the principles of accountability, transparency, human rights and to better tackle modern crimes like cybercrime.

The Public Health Act 1935 is also currently undergoing a comprehensive review and should be tabled in this House in the not-too-distant future.

Today the Forestry Bill will be tabled in Parliament. This will mark a significant milestone in Fiji's forestry reform agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, the Education Bill will also be tabled in Parliament, which is a review of the outdated Education Act 1966.

Yesterday, we were assured in this Chamber by the honourable Minister for Fisheries that the Fisheries Act 1941, another outdated law is also in the final stages of its review and will soon see itself in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my leave, I wish to reaffirm this House that legislative review is central to Fiji's progress. As legislators, we must adhere to keep our laws up to-date as it will strengthen our institutions, promote compliance with international standards, enhance deterrence against wrongdoing, build our economy and ensure that our laws continue to serve the people fairly, firmly and without foresight.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Ratu Vakalalabure for his very important statement on the state of our laws and their relevance, although I will admit my bias on the subject.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure for his End of Week Statement, highlighting the importance of legislative review in moving our nation forward. I rise to echo his sentiments and reaffirm the Coalition Government's strong commitment to a comprehensive and coordinated programme of law reform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of legislation is not simply an administrative task. It is an essential mechanism for ensuring that the laws of our nation remain responsive, relevant, and reflective of the aspirations of our people. Over the past years, under the Coalition Government, we have seen remarkable legislative activity that demonstrates this very commitment. Since 2023, a total of 84 Bills have been tabled in Parliament, 29 Bills in 2023, 23 Bills in 2024, and 34 Bills tabled this year. Of these, 73 Bills have been enacted into law, with the remainder under active consideration by the relevant Parliamentary Standing Committee. I can make assurance that by the end of the year, around 40 Bills will be enacted this year. This reflects not just the quantity, but the quality of reforms introduced. It is designed to modernise governance, strengthen transparency, and enhance

the delivery of public service.

In 2023, landmark legislation included the Media Industry Development (Repeal) Act, restoring press freedom, the iTaukei Land Trust (Amendment) 2023, ensuring fairness and accessibility for landowners, and the Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2023, which improves workers' rights and protection.

In 2024, Parliament saw the introduction of significant structural and social reforms, such as the Child Care Protection Bill 2024, Child Justice Bill 2024, modernising Fiji's child protection framework. The National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024, reflecting Fiji's leadership in climate and disaster resilience. The Truth and Reconciliation Bill 2024, introduced by the honourable Prime Minister, promotes healing and national unity. In December, we will bring in the Referendum Bill, which should have been brought earlier by the previous government. We wonder why? Maybe they thought the Constitution would never be amended. Well, rest assured, it is coming in December.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like to maintain this momentum that is evidenced by the work done so far. There is a growing recognition of the importance of the work of legislative drafters, which is unfortunately contrasted with the shortage of drafters in jurisdictions all over the world, as you are fully aware, especially here in the Pacific. It is therefore imperative that we ensure that this specialised area of practice within the legal profession is further developed and resourced. That aside, there is even a greater need for critical policy development that is crucial in the development of any law. For our law reform, ministries are expected to monitor outdated practices, initiate active research and policy review to address these issues that require law reforms. These are proactive steps so that our laws are up to-date as possible and not playing catch-up.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the key themes are policy development. This is where policy is designed by the ministries. The second phase will be the endorsement of Cabinet. The review of the law, like the Fisheries Bill yesterday, it was just the review of the law, drafting of the law, the endorsement of the Cabinet Subcommittee on Legislation, the endorsement of Cabinet and, of course, the tabling in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this legislative review process is continuing. The Office of the Solicitor-General, together with line ministries is reviewing existing laws to find outdated provisions, overlapping functions, and areas that need to be outdated to match new policies and Fiji's international commitments. This work ensures that our laws remains relevant, practical and in line with the country's current needs and priorities.

The Coalition Government is also focused on building the capacity of our public service, to strengthen the link between policy development and lawmaking. Training and coordination across ministries will help ensure that all new laws are based on clear policy directions, good research and proper consultation. This approach will support more effective, timely and well-coordinated reforms that reflect the goals of our national development agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2023, the Coalition Government revived the Fiji Law Reform. This agency was defunded by the previous government. The purpose of the Fiji Law Reform is to engage in consultation in terms of the review of law. Since, it is re-established, these are currently some of the references they are currently working on, the High Court (Constitutional Redress) Rules 1998 and Magistrates Court Rules 1945.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you are familiar with this. We have talked about the delay in court. We really need to fix these rules so that we can expedite these cases, so people can have full confidence in terms of case management.

We also have the Fiji Law Reform Commission Act 1979 which is under review. The Liquor Act 2006 and the Legal Regulation 2008. We are talking about the Police Act. Today's *Fiji Times* covered the discussion at the Fiji Law Society in the lack of capacity and the constraints that the Fiji Police have because of their outdated law. Human Trafficking, Security Industry Act 2010 that is currently being reviewed, the Cyber Security, the Land Use Act, the State Land Act 1945, Online Safety Act 2018, Mining Act 1965, Honours and Awards Act 1995, the agricultural related laws about seven pieces of legislation. The Ministry of Defence Act or the Military Justice Bill, the Review of the Immigration Act of 2003. On Monday I will receive the Report in terms of the consultation done on this laws - Citizenship Act 2009 and Passport Act 2002.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Members are right as to reviewing and modernising our laws is critical in moving the country forward. It ensures that our governance framework keeps pace with economic growth, digital transformation, social inclusion and environmentally sustainability. Through our collective efforts, Parliament, Ministries and the Office of Attorney-General are building a modern, transparent and fair legislative system that oppose the rule of law and advances the rights of Fijians. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government remains fully committed to this Legislative Renewal Agenda and I commend the honourable Member for underscoring its importance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I resume my seat, I would like to respond to honourable Koya regarding his speech on the independence of the courts, something we hold dear on this side of the House, something we promised, if anything, the Coalition Government has established and demonstrated, the democracy is at work. The independence of the court, that is the legacy we want to leave behind. We want to build the confidence and trust in the system. From day one, the honourable Prime Minister, we will comply with it, and we will remain committed, honourable Koya and the Opposition. There is no need, and we are prohibited to do so. If anything, we want to assure the people of Fiji that the rule of law will prevail in our beloved country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that there will be three Bills for Consideration today:

- (1) First Bill will be for First Reading;
- (2) Second Bill will be for debate, vote and enactment; and
- (3) Third Bill will be moved under Standing Order 51.

BILLS – FIRST READING

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 84, I move:

That the Education Bill 2025 be now read the first time.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr Speaker, Sir, I hereby second the motion.

[A Bill for an Act to give effect to the Constitutional Right to Education to establish the education advisory council, to establish the national curriculum and assessment authority, to provide for the recognition and registration of schools, to provide for early childhood education, primary education, secondary education and technical and vocational education and training, to provide for special and inclusive education, to establish the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority and continue the Fiji Teachers Registration Board, to provide for the registration of teachers, to continue the higher education commission, to provide for the registration of higher education institutions, to provide for higher education, and for related matters (Bill No. 34 of 2025).]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, in accordance with Standing Order 84(1), the Bill has now been read the first time. The Bill will now be listed on the Order Paper and set down for Second Reading at a future sitting of Parliament.

Honourable Members, given that the Second Reading of the Bill will be scheduled to a future sitting of Parliament, I encourage all Members to study and examine the Bill and prepare accordingly, noting that the Second Reading will primarily focus on the principles and merits of the Bill.

ADOPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now deal with the second Bill and I remind the honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 6th November 2025, the debate on the Bill will be limited to one hour.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 6th November, 2025, I move:

That the Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34/2025), be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, we have many children who do not have the benefit of a nurturing family. A loving, adoptive stable home can give a child in need a sense of belonging and the best possible chance to achieve their full potential. The Adoption Act 2020 was designed to ensure that all adoptions are child-centered, uphold the best interest of the child and prevent illegal or unethical practices.

The Act was aligned with Article 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention on the Protection of and Co-operation in Respect to Inter-Country Adoption. Mr. Speaker, the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption is an international treaty that establishes safeguards to protect children, birth parents and prospective adoptive parents from unethical and illegal practices in international adoptions. This includes setting up systems for co-operation, preventing child trafficking and verifying that adoptions are legitimate.

Adoption Bill 2020 was brought under Fiji Parliament's Standing Order 51. It was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and we are informed that it was widely consulted. Following its gazettal for enforcement early this year, we realised that there were inconsistencies making it difficult to fully operationalise the Act. The urgency of this Bill lies in the need to provide clarity, consistency and efficiency in adoption proceedings, ensuring that the welfare of the child remains paramount.

Our Ministry, in collaboration with the Judiciary, the Office of the Solicitor-General, and legal practitioners, conducted extensive implementation consultations. These consultations identified a number of legal and operational gaps that have hindered the effective enforcement of the Act.

There are inconsistent interpretation and application of certain provisions across the courts, procedural ambiguities that cause unnecessary delays in adoption decisions, weak enforcement mechanisms, and unclear institutional roles among responsible authorities. The Act empowers the Minister to make regulations. However, it does not confer authority on the Chief Justice to make

rules governing adoption proceedings, resulting in procedural limitations within the courts.

Since the operationalisation of the Act, supporting regulations and court rules remain pending, creating uncertainty for both applicants and legal offices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of October 2025, there is a backlog of 467 cases, that is 467 children who could be placed in stable homes and denied this opportunity as we discuss this amendment. The key amendments will achieve the following:

- (1) Section 22(a) will empower the court to appoint a guardian at any stage of the adoption, particularly where the birth parents are deceased, absent or incapacitated. This ensures that that no child is left in limbo during lengthy legal proceedings.
- (2) Section 58(a) will empower the Chief Justice to make rules of court for adoption related matters, ensuring consistent, efficient and fair procedures across all jurisdictions.
- (3) Section 59(a) will introduce an appeal mechanism for individuals aggrieved by the administrative decisions, reinforcing transparency and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these amendments are designed to address the current operational challenges and enable the full and effective implementation of the Adoption Act 2020. If I may add, our Ministry is also implementing several reforms to strengthen adoption services, to complement the passage of this Bill, including training and certification of adoption in child welfare offices, development of a secure electronic case system to reduce delays and improve transparency, and strengthen collaboration with the judiciary, the Office of the Attorney-General and development partners.

The Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2025 is not merely a legal adjustment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a compassionate and practical response to the realities faced by officers who implement the law. This Bill bridges the gaps that have hindered our adoption system and ensures that every child in need of a family can be placed without unnecessary delay. I therefore commend the Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2025 to this honourable House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Each Member who intervenes will be allocated 5 minutes to speak within the allocated one hour for the debate on the motion.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think you may not need that hour. I think yesterday the honourable Minister for Lands actually spelt out the legal needs that were needed to be done in terms of this particular Bill, and it is something that lawyers, magistrates and judges as pointed out that it was needed.

Now, of course, this is on the back of the other laws that had been put in place. And sometimes these things happen, find out at a later stage when we passed laws that some things may need to be amended. So, we understand that from this side of the House, and I think we are all in total agreement with respect to the amendments that are being made, and it is facilitative rather than creating an animosity in this particular environment regarding deferring opinions on this particular issue. This is for the betterment of that particular provision and just in short, Sir, we support the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- I am presuming his speaking on behalf of the Opposition.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did mention yesterday that if given the opportunity, I will rise again today to contribute to the passage of this Bill. It is a Bill that we have decided yesterday we are going to work together to bring this to pass. The substantive Act is already in force, except that when they decided to operationalise it since May 2025, it was discovered that there are certain areas that remains, that needed to be fixed, remains an anomaly both in policy as well as operational matters - these soft amendments have sought to address.

Why do adoptions happen in Fiji as they would happen elsewhere around the world? The underlying ideology there is that we expect in any nation that children growing up in a country would grow up in a space where they are safe, protected and provided for. Unfortunately, in some instances, children find themselves in spaces where these three are not able to provide - instances where natural parents have passed away, instances where unfortunately parents fall on the way on the way on the wrong side of the law, there are instances where unfortunately parents died due to road accidents and hazards that were not expected; there are parents that go into drugs and there are, of course, unfortunate instances where children are born as a result of sexual offences.

We need to be mindful that in such instances, it would create a situation where children will find themselves not with choice or will find themselves in a space where protection, provision, education and safety is going to be compromised.

As we heard from the honourable Minister, at the moment, there are currently over 400 adoption cases that are pending. The bipartisan approach that have been taken by the honourable Leader of the Opposition and his team is, we are grateful for that. Thank you, honourable Koya for understanding. As practitioners, we know that these things are not usually very easy to do, separation of parents to transfer their legal rights as parents to those that they have preferred to look after their children and are often very emotionally draining at times. I think it is on that note that we thank the honourable Leader of Opposition and honourable Koya for standing up on their side to approach this bipartisan basis so that we can pass it collectively. For that reason, I support the Bill before the House.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I would again thank the Opposition for their understanding and honourable Vosarogo for explaining further. I have nothing further to say. I am just grateful that both sides of the House are willing to support this amendment Bill.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Adoption Act 2020 (Bill No. 34/2025) moved under Standing Order 51 is passed and enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2025)]

FORESTRY BILL 2025

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Forestry Bill 2025 (Bill No. 36 of 2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to a Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at the next sitting of Parliament and that upon

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

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to update this House on a proposed Forestry Bill (Bill No. 36 of 2025) which has been endorsed by Cabinet and is being tabled for First Reading. The Forestry Bill 2025 marks a significant milestone in Fiji's Forestry Reform Agenda. It represents the culmination of extensive consultations, technical reviews and national dialogue undertaken over the past three years to modernise Fiji's forestry laws and align them with current global and national priorities for sustainable forest management.

The current Forest Act 1992 has served Fiji well for over three decades. However, it was crafted during a time when the focus of forestry legislation was primarily on timber extraction and production. Over the years, the sector has evolved, and our forests today are recognised not only for their economic value but also their environmental, cultural and social significance, including their role in biodiversity conservation, watershed production, watershed protection and climate resilience. The proposed Forestry Bill 2025, therefore, responds to the need for a modern, inclusive and accountable legal framework that promotes the sustainable management and protection of all types of forest resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry, with the support of the Asian Development Bank and other development partners, undertook a comprehensive review of the Forest Act from 2023 to 2025. This process was complemented by two rounds of national consultations with stakeholders across the country, including our plantation sectors, their respective trusts, relevant government ministries and statutory bodies, private sector operators, non-governmental organisations, community representatives and the general public.

The final round of consultation was held on 15th May, 2025, at the Grand Pacific Hotel and included participants from across government and the forestry industry. Public transparency was ensured through the publication of the draft Bill in national newspapers and on the Ministry's website for open comments and submission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to report back that the feedback received from these consultations was overwhelmingly supportive and has been carefully considered and incorporated into the current draft before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Forest Bill 2025 introduces several key reforms that modernise the governance and operation of the forestry sector. Among them are clearer definitions and objectives that align with the Climate Change Act 2021 and recognise the inclusion of mangroves as part of Fiji's forest ecosystem. New governance structures, including the establishment of a Forestry Advisory Council to strengthen stakeholder participation and oversight.

Introduction of four licencing categories to better regulate forest management, non-timber forest products, import and export and wood processing and treatment operations, enhance compliance and enforcement provisions including fixed penalties, stop work orders and a newly created forestry tribunal to handle appeals and disputes. Recognition of customary rights for forest

resource owners ensuring equitable benefit sharing and creation of forest finance which provides sustainable funding mechanisms to support forest protection, restoration and management while promoting a forest-based economy.

Mr. Speaker, the enactment of this Bill is critical to the future of Fiji's forestry sector. The threats of deforestation, climate change and illegal logging require a robust legislative response that not only protects our forests but also empowers landowners and communities to participate meaningfully and responsibly in the forest economy. This Bill ensures that our forests are managed as renewable national assets, balancing economic opportunity with ecological responsibility. It aligns Fiji with global Sustainable Development Goals and strengthens our contribution to the fight against climate change. Furthermore, the Bill promotes transparency, accountability and innovation, providing the framework needed for modern forest practises, carbon trading initiatives and sustainable financing through climate-related mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of all stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Bill - the Ministry of Forestry staff, staff from the Office of the Solicitor General, development partners from the Asian Development Bank and their team of forestry experts, government stakeholders, private sector operators, Fiji Forestry Professionals Association, foresters across Fiji and traditional landowners whose stewardship of our forests continues to sustain our people and our nation.

I respectfully urge honourable Members of this House to support the passage of the Forest Bill 2025. Its enactment will not only modernise Fiji's forestry laws, but also ensure that our forest resources are protected, valued and sustainably managed for the benefit of present and future generations.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will give the right of reply to honourable Banivalu as the mover of the motion.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the Statement that she has made. Forestry is indeed a very important part of our make-up as a country. I think the recommendations for the review for the laws have been coming to Parliament over the past few annual reports for forestry. So, from our side, we look forward to having the Bill and we look forward too for the Committee to be able to look into it and eventually bring back the finished product back to Parliament.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to add on to what honourable Usamate said, obviously this is something important to us. I think it is timely that it has actually come, especially in light of the fact that this has an attachment to climate change, et cetera, a lot that can occur and for the benefit of our forestry in Fiji. So, happy to hear that it is actually coming to our Committee to have a good look at it. There are quite a few places around the world that have done this and there is modern legislation that is around, so happy to have a good look at it when we actually get it.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Usamate and honourable Koya for their comments and their support of the Forestry Bill 2025. I look forward to their support when we debate the Bill and pass it in the next sitting of Parliament.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Forestry Bill 2025 (Bill No. 36/2025) referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and the Committee to report on the Bill in the next sitting of Parliament]

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 24th November, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting and I thank you all for your contributions throughout the week. I now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 24th November, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.27 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 252/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 2329)



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
(Hon. A.M. Radrodro)

Response to Written Question No. 252/2025 asked by honourable Hem Chand is as follows:

- (1) The allocation of Government grants to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a matter of great importance, as it directly supports the delivery of quality education, institutional development, and the alignment of tertiary education with our national priorities. Section 7 of the Higher Education Act 2008 dictates mandated functions of the Commission, one of which is to allocate government funds marked for higher education annually to higher education institutions according to a transparent and well-publicised criteria for allocation. Government grants to HEIs are allocated through a mixed funding model that combines per capita elements with institutional performance and planning assessments. This model was developed by consultants through the creation of Costed Operational Templates and the Annual Higher Education Data Collection process, both managed by the Higher Education Commission Fiji (HECF).

This template designates from Higher Education Regulations 2009 specifically from Section 54 which outlines the criteria for grants administered by the Higher Education Commission in Fiji.

- (2) Particularly, Part 7 of the Regulations deals with Grants and Funding mechanisms for higher education institutions and Section 54 specifically outlines the criteria and conditions under which the Higher Education Commission (HEC) may award grants to institutions. Under this framework, each fully registered HEI is required to submit detailed information to HECF, which includes:

- Output areas of funding requests;
- Operational cost breakdowns
- Student enrolment and completion data;
- Staffing data and workforce forecasts;
- Educator's listings;
- Strategic, business, procurement and risk management plans;
- Financial documents such as bank statements, annual reports, and audited financial statements;
- Forecast enrolment data;
- Provisional enrolment data;
- Person to post listing and workforce planning;
- Other relevant supporting documents.

This data enables HECF to comprehensively assess the financial and operational performance of each institution. As a result, larger HEIs with higher student and staff populations generally attract higher funding allocations, while smaller institutions receive proportionate funding based on their scale and capacity.

- (3) The grants provided to HEIs cover a range of institutional needs, including salaries, programme delivery, research, rent, utilities, advertising, IT system upgrades, and the development of new academic programmes.
- (4) An important component of the allocation process is the review of grant utilisation from the previous year. If an institution has fully utilized and acquitted its grant as approved, that amount forms the base grant for the following financial year. Institutions may also submit requests for additional funds to support expansion, innovation, or new programmes, which must be justified with supporting documents aligned with their strategic workforce, procurement, annual report and business plans. These requests are assessed alongside Costed Operational Plans and other financial and planning documents.
- (5) The Government adopts a balanced mixed model which considers:
 - Financial and operational performance;
 - Institutional capacity and compliance;
 - Enrolment and completion data; and
 - Effective utilisation of previous grants.
- (6) This balanced approach ensures that Government funding allocations are fair, transparent, and evidence-based, thereby promoting accountability, sustainability and quality across Fiji's higher education sector. It also reinforces the alignment of institutional outcomes with national development and workforce priorities.