

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	2352
Communications from the Speaker	2352-2353
(1) Welcome	
(2) Deputy Opposition Whip – Hon. H. Chand	
(3) Council of Pacific Polytech	
Ministerial Statement	2353-2358
(1) Official Visit to New Zealand – 8 th -15 th October, 2025 - Hon. S.D. Turaga	
Questions	2358-2382
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Establishment of Online Complaints Portal	(Q/No. 253/2025)
(2) LAGI 2025 Fiji Exhibition – Fiji’s Participation	(Q/No. 254/2025)
(3) Monitoring Mechanism – Levy on School Enrolment	(Q/No. 255/2025)
(4) Diagnostic Study of the Energy Sector	(Q/No. 256/2025)
(5) Long Term Strategies – Land Lease Expiration	(Q/No. 259/2025)
(6) Transportation of Livestock to Outer Islands	(Q/No. 257/2025)
(7) Progress on Implementation of SP-MIS and IBMS	(Q/No. 258/2025)
(8) Progress of Survey of Unsurveyed Mataqali Land	(Q/No. 260/2025)
(9) Age Limit Increase for Bus Fare Assistance Programme	(Q/No. 261/2025)
(10) Positive Impacts of the Rural Housing Programme	(Q/No. 262/2025)
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Primary and Secondary School Heads on Acting Positions	(Q/No. 263/2025)
(2) Statistics on Ice Plants in Rural and Maritime Regions	(Q/No. 264/2025)
(3) Statistics on Police Officers Terminated/Demoted	(Q/No. 265/2025)
Bills – First Reading	2382
Review of International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue 1979	2382-2383

MONDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service, Public Enterprises, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation

Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General

Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development.

Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs

Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodoro, Minister for Education

Hon. Charan Jeeth Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

Hon. Tomasi Niuvalu Tunabuna, Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services

Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Agni Deo Singh, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations

Hon. Sashi Kiran, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Information

Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts

Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Viliame Naupoto, Minister for Immigration

Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Minister for Policing and Communications

Hon. Mosese Dreacala Bulitavu, Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister

Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Defence

Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Aliko Bia, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu, Assistant Minister for Justice

Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva, Assistant Minister for Transport and Infrastructure

Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Sachida Nand, Assistant Minister for Trade

Hon. Shalen Kumar, Assistant Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs

Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad

Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica

Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal

Absent

Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Premila D. Kumar
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 7th November, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. A special welcome to Members who are returning from tour of duties abroad, especially as representatives of Fiji in the recently concluded COP30 in Brazil. You are most welcome back to the House.

To those seated in the gallery and to everyone tuning in via television and those who are on online platforms, you are most welcome. Your continued interest and engagement with the working of Parliament constantly brings life to this democratic process, and we are delighted to have you following us. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Deputy Opposition Whip – Hon. H. Chand

For the information of all honourable Members, I wish to inform the House that I have received a formal notification from the Opposition Whip, honourable Jone Usamate, advising that the Opposition has appointed honourable Hem Chand as the Deputy Whip of the Opposition. It is effective from 2nd June, 2025. I take this opportunity to congratulate honourable Hem Chand for his appointment and wish him well.

Council of Pacific Polytech

For additional information, honourable Members, I had received a letter from the Chairperson of the Council of Pacific Polytech. I have written to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for a response. I will undertake a thorough assessment of the response and the matter, in its entirety, before I determine a ruling.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Official Visit to New Zealand – 8th to 15th October, 2025

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

Before I begin with my speech, as a member of the Nasareci Methodist Church, formerly called Nepani, I would like to acknowledge the commitment, prayers and devotion of our parents as we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our church last Sunday. So much this nation has gone through. If anything, it is the prayers of the people for this nation to be united so that our future is chartered through peace, progress and unity.

Vinaka vakalevu vei kemuni na neimami i tubutubu, kemuni na qase ko ni a solia nomuni bula me tara kina e dua na valenilotu me i vakananumi tiko kina na limasagavulu ni yabaki ena siga Vakarauwai.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to inform this august House of our official visit to New Zealand from 8th to 15th October, 2025, undertaken at the invitation of the Fijian High Commissioner in Wellington. The visit had three principal objectives, to -

- (1) officiate at the Fiji Day Diplomatic Corp Reception on 9th October and the Fiji Day celebration on 11th October, both hosted by the Fiji High Commission.
- (2) hold bilateral engagements with my New Zealand counterpart, honourable Paul Goldsmith, and Senior Officials from the New Zealand Ministry of Justice and Parole Board, with a view to strengthening cooperation in the law and justice sector.
- (3) meet members of the Fijian diaspora in Wellington and Auckland through *talanoa* sessions, listening to their concerns and updating them on Government initiatives.

It was an honour to deliver an opening remark at the Fiji Day Diplomatic Corp Reception on 9th October and Fiji Day celebration on 11th October. Hosting the Pacific and Heads of Diplomatic Corp based in Wellington necessitated our presence as part of the Coalition Government. Our presence as political leaders re-affirmed our role in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), Pacific Islands Forum (PIFs), and the wider bilateral and multi-lateral agreements. The events showcased

our national identity, unity and resilience, and reminded us of the strength of our people abroad.

On 9th October, 2025, I met with honourable Paul Goldsmith, New Zealand Minister for Justice, for discussions centered on the Law and Justice Reform Roadmap 2025-2030, endorsed by Cabinet and owned collectively by our justice sector institutions. Fiji is confident that New Zealand's Pacific Justice Sector Support will complement our reform agenda, particularly in digital case management, corrections, child justice, legislative drafting and expansion of Legal Aid Services.

I also visited the New Zealand Parole Board with representatives from the Fiji Corrections Service. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House had approved the re-establishment of the Parole Board through the National Budget. The Government's allocation of \$112,500 reflects our commitment to rebuilding a system that is culturally responsive and effective.

As I was reminded during our engagement, justice is not a place we arrive at, it is a journey we must walk with, with wisdom and humility. The experience of New Zealand, particularly with indigenous and Pasifika communities, provides us with invaluable guidance that will tailor our own model for Fiji. The exchange allowed us to study the New Zealand Parole Act 2002 and the systems that support parole operations in New Zealand. The lessons learned will guide Fiji as we reactivate our own Parole Board. New Zealand has also reaffirmed its readiness to provide ongoing technical support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also held meetings with New Zealand's Ministry of Justice and Senior Officials, as well as with Professor Jon Fraenkel of Victoria University, Wellington, all of whom have had considerable experience in referendum administration. This was timely, following the Supreme Court Advisory Opinion on 29th August this year. We discussed legal frameworks, clarity of referendum questions, drafting of referendum framework, voter education, timing, cost implications, inclusivity, and implementation of results. New Zealand's decades of experience will greatly assist Fiji as we prepare for this important constitutional process. If I may say so, Sir, that we will soon be tabling the referendum Bill to this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *talanoa* sessions were held with our diaspora from 8th to 14th October. Something that came to my surprise were the categories of the Fijian diaspora. The most recent is the Fiji Corrections of about 80 families in Wellington. Some are also employed in Whanganui and others in Auckland. There is an increasing number of people being employed in Corrections, and I am advised that future recruitments will be relied on applicants from Fiji.

There is another group, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is hardly being discussed. These are construction workers. I was amazed when I was advised that one of them owns a five-bedroom house and pays a rent of \$800 a week. If we look at the wages of construction workers in Fiji, this is a far cry. So, they have made themselves better, and they continue to increase in number.

Another category consists of those who are employed in forestry. Another category comprises of drivers and, of course, we have our Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) workers. This is the largest diaspora who are in New Zealand and continue to send remittances that is beneficial to this nation.

The meeting with the Fijian diaspora started on Wednesday evening, an hour after our arrival. There were *talanoa* sessions each evening, including a combined church service on Sunday. As we interacted with the Fijian diaspora in Wellington, Auckland and surrounding towns, it became evident and clear that social media has distorted the many achievements of the Coalition Government - media freedom, budget by the people and for the people, developments in our rural infrastructure, the independence of the three arms of Government and policy decisions targeting the needs of our

people here at home and abroad.

We listened to first-hand accounts of non-participation of thousands of our people due to the late arrival of ballot papers in the last Election. I can assure this House that this problem will be resolved with the upcoming election. On the late passport applications and processing among others, I reaffirmed them that we will work collaboratively and within the law with other agencies to ensure that these needs are addressed.

A matter that required clarification was the 2021 amendment law requiring married women to change their names in birth certificates to vote. I re-affirmed that this law was repealed in 2023 through Act Nos. 18 and 19, restoring the rights of women to use their maiden name, consistent with the High Court's ruling in the *Ganilau v Attorney-General* case.

At the conclusion of the visit, it was proposed that a multi-agency government delegation return to New Zealand to deliver direct services to our diaspora. This would include a representative from the Births, Deaths & Marriages Registry, the Ministry of Employment, FNPF, Fijian Elections Office and Legal Aid.

Travel expenses for the delegation were borne by their respective Ministries. The cost of attending the two Fiji Day event was \$8,186.92. The cost of engagements related to bilateral co-operation and justice-sector was \$3,596.92, totalling \$11,793.84.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visit was more than just celebrating Fiji Day, it was a strategic engagement with a key regional partner, enabling us to advance justice reforms, deepen bilateral co-operation and strengthen service delivery to Fijians living abroad. As one Pacific Leader had said, “we must not wait for the tide to carry us, we must learn to steer the *vaka* (canoe) ourselves.” Invitations for Fiji Day and similar events simply opened the door. It is our duty to walk through that door and seize every opportunity available for our people.

I acknowledge the dedication of staff at the Fiji High Commission in Wellington, our partner agencies, and the hundreds of members of our diaspora who engaged with us during this visit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to all our people, I reaffirm that your Coalition Government cares for you, whether engagements take us to New Zealand, Australia, Japan or Solomon Islands, we will continue to use every invitation, every platform and every partnership to secure knowledge and opportunities that strengthen Fiji’s justice system and improve services for our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the official visit strengthened Fiji’s bilateral partnership with New Zealand, reinforced our justice reform priorities and reaffirmed our commitment to serving Fijians wherever they reside.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition, or his designate for his response.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General on strengthening bilateral relations and honouring our Fijian diaspora.

While the spirit of fostering international ties and acknowledging the invaluable contribution of our Fijian diaspora is commendable, the premise and execution of the statement particularly in light of the honourable Minister's recent overseas trip raises serious and immediate concerns regarding constitutional mandate, fiscal prudence and ministerial accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while listening to the Statement, I was wondering or expecting to listen to how many MOUs were signed - none or zero. A bilateral meeting with a counterpart and basically nothing!

Mr. Speaker, let us go to the more tangible bit of his Statement. The sustainable expenditure incurred during the multiple Ministers' travel overseas to attend Fiji Day celebrations. We have seen the figures disclosed of the honourable Minister for Justice's trip alone. The cost exceeded \$11,000 of taxpayers' money when combined with the travel expenses of the honourable Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers, the total cost spirals into tens of thousands of dollars. In a nation grappling with urgent needs in healthcare, education and essential infrastructure, diverting such a significant amount for Ministerial attendance at what are fundamentally ceremonial and community-led events is physically indefensible. That money would have been reinvested into the public service which directly benefited all Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Speak on the subject.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Fiji maintains a network of professional diplomats, ambassadors and high commissioners who are salaried to stations overseas, precisely to represent our nation at such events. Their mandate includes engaging with the diaspora and fostering good bilateral relations. These professionals....

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order, and I recognise the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Point of Order 60(1). The Ministerial Statement is on the content of the visit - what was carried out there, what was delivered and also the views of the diaspora, how can they benefit from the visit, so it is the content of the visit. What you are referring to is not relevant, under Standing Order 60(1), because you are talking about the administration of the visit and not the content. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Let me put it this way, honourable Members, Standing Order 60 is very clear. It states, and I quote:

“When speaking, members must confine their observations to the subject under consideration.”

If I were to construct that meaning very strictly, it would be, as the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament said, strictly on the issue of the visit. I would allow the peripheral comments that are related to the visit, and that means what other outcomes of that visit would be, but I would not allow for you to explore and raise other issues that are not directly relevant to the topic of the discussion.

You have the floor, honourable Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the timing and reasoning behind this Ministerial Statement is highly susceptible. It is clear that the wave of public disconnect, allowing the mass exodus of Ministers from Fiji during the National Independence Day Celebration has focused a certain need for justification. The narrative of the bilateral meeting appears to be an urgent....

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Can you just take your seat, again, honourable Maharaj. I recognise a Point of Order being raised.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, under Standing Order 60(1) on relevance. I think the honourable Member is still disrespecting your decision on the ruling that was already made, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will make the ruling now. Can you now stick strictly to the observation of the visit by the honourable Minister on that matter, honourable Maharaj? I will stop you from continuing, if you continue from where you are now. You have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, while bilateral meetings in the justice sector, such as the Minister's recent engagement on the rule of law, legislative drafting and anti-money laundering with the regional partners, a legitimate part of the portfolio conflicting with the jurisdiction of the Fiji Day trip is an act of political optimism.

If the bilateral meetings were truly the primary and essential reason for the travel, they should have been announced as such from the outset. Just today, we have been informed that this was supposed to be a bilateral meeting but with the other objectives of the Minister attending the Fiji Day celebration in New Zealand.

While we respect our diaspora in New Zealand, they have contributed a lot, I would like to ask the honourable Minister, what are the tangible benefits coming in from the diaspora from this particular meeting? Have you actually engaged or confirmed any foreign investment coming in from the diaspora in New Zealand? I did not hear it in your Ministerial Statement.

If there is no tangible benefit, Mr. Speaker, from such a meeting, the question is, why do we need to have this kind of overseas meeting or bilateral meeting? There was no MOU signed with the counterpart in New Zealand, nothing came out from the meeting with the diaspora, so it comes back to the fundamental question, should we be wasting this kind of money in overseas trips, Mr. Speaker? This money can be better utilised for Fijians in the country itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call on the honourable Minister for Justice to strictly:

- adhere to the constitutional and departmental mandate and leave the administrative issues on foreign policies to the Minister for Foreign Affairs;
- acknowledge and apologise for the excessive and unnecessary expenditure to taxpayers, as he has stated that he had used \$11,000 of taxpayers' money for the overseas trip;
- commit to a transparent review of all ministerial overseas policies;
- introduce clear expenditure caps or strict necessity tests to ensure that such trips provide a direct and quantifiable benefit to the nation that outweighs the costs; and
- decrease the expense.

We can increase the salary of so-called construction workers in Fiji, whereby they can have a better life in Fiji. Until such time that this House sees evidence of all real accountability, we must conclude that these trips were a significant waste of public funds and a shameful failure of ministerial duties. The Minister's effort to strengthen bilateral relations, on the floor of this House, is a weak attempt to patch up the damage done to the public trust.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will now move on to the next Ministerial Statement.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have only one Statement this morning.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will accept that. I think it may have been some misunderstanding between your Office and our Secretariat. If there is another one, we will defer it, in any case.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Establishment of the Online Complaints Portal (Question No. 253/2025)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament whether he will consider establishing an online complaints portal and a dedicated telephone line to enable members of the public to directly lodge complaints against police officers?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament - *bula vinaka* and good morning to you all. I rise to respond to the question that has been raised by the honourable Leader of the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe the question is relevant and an important one too; to be asked to the police and to the Ministry.

For the information of the honourable Leader of the Opposition, there is an ongoing programme which I had spoken about in this honourable House – an uplift programme between the Fiji Police Force and the Australian Federal Police. It is quite an intensive programme. It covers a whole scope of things, including the improvement of the police operational effectiveness. Also, the improvement in building a more professional organisation for a more professional police officer, a more disciplined one who is able to effectively carry its mission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two categories of complaints for ease of reference; these are normally called CAS and CAP. CAS simply means Complaints Against Service and CAP is Complaints Against Police. I am made to understand that this question here is to do with CAP. But overall, we are happy to see there has been progress made under the uplift programme on improving the police force, especially to do with rebuilding the confidence and trust with the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue that has been raised, we have a current system in place, a platform that has been adopted by the Police. There are about 10 ways that a member of the public, or anyone could report against a police officer, or including Complaints Against Service (CAS). If I may very briefly, there are 10, and I have included the 11th one too, it is the Minister for Policing and Communication:

- (1) Police Toll Freeline 917.
- (2) Crime Stoppers 919.
- (3) Social media platforms – Police Facebook page and Police website.
- (4) In-person reports at the various stations.
- (5) Complaints to the Commissioner of Police – you can write directly to the Commissioner of Police, or officers or Divisional Commanders.
- (6) A platform on internal affairs – you can write to the internal affairs.
- (7) External oversight which includes the Police and FICAC for allegations involving bribery or corrupt practices.

That is the list of the various platforms that are available for the public and society to lodge the complaints, whether it is CAS or CAP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question before us, in my view, yes, we will consider, and I am firm on that to improve the service provided to our people. This is a key area that we must improve. For an online portal and a dedicated telephone, I can assure the honourable Leader of the Opposition, I will consider that very seriously and give relevant instructions to the Commissioner on actions that could be taken.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we draw lessons from our regional neighbours, I believe New Zealand has an independent police conduct authority and Australia has state-based oversight bodies which are examples of best practice when you look at complaints made against police officers. The honourable Minister has spoken about FICAC, but I believe FICAC is mandated to look at anti-corruption or financial gain or benefit. However, in a bid to strengthen accountability, can the honourable Minister consider the establishment of an independent body with statutory powers to oversee all sorts of complaints made against police officers that are independent?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had mentioned that we have a department in the Police which is Internal Affairs. There is also consideration at this point on how to improve that particular department, whether we shift them aside for more transparency and accountability, so there is work towards that to uplift the programme.

Perhaps, if I could also use the opportunity, moving forward, on how we can improve the process of complaints, whether it is the Police or any other organisation. Perhaps in the future, we could be looking into a national emergency centre or an operations centre that can receive all calls. This is something that we have been talking about, and something worth considering in the future.

LAGI 2025 Fiji Exhibition – Fiji's Participation
(Question No. 254/2025)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on Fiji's participation at the LAGI 2025 Fiji Exhibition and how this initiative supports Fiji's efforts towards climate resilience and sustainable tourism development?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to respond to the question from the honourable Member - a question about a moment that may define our future, a moment where art meets renewable energy, where culture meets climate action, and where Fiji leads the world with vision and courage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to first provide context. LAGI stands for the Land Art Generator Initiative, a US-based non-profit organisation founded in 2008 by Elizabeth Monoian and Robert Ferry. Its mission is simple, yet profound; to use public art as a platform for generating renewable energy and water for communities. Since 2010, LAGI has organised international design competitions and community co-design projects in cities such as Abu Dhabi, New York, Copenhagen, Santa Monica, Melbourne, and Mannheim. These projects transform functional infrastructure into cultural landmarks and installations that are both beautiful and productive.

Through LAGI, creativity becomes a catalyst for sustainability. Artists, architects, and engineers collaborate to design structures that produce clean energy, harvest potable water, and serve

as educational and cultural destinations. This is innovation with integrity, art that works, and beauty that sustains.

Mr. Speaker, Fiji has made history as the first Pacific Island nation to host a LAGI design competition with the LAGI 2025 Fiji Exhibition officially launched by the Fiji Arts Council. It is the first of its kind in the Pacific. It relates to what vision means to us. As it says, without vision, the people perish as outlined in Proverbs 29:18. Today, I present LAGI 2025 in this august House as a vision, one grounded in facts, supported by proven designs and engineered for impact. These installations are not abstract concepts; they are architecturally designed and engineering-certified solutions, capable of generating clean energy, harvesting potable water and creating cultural landmarks that will transform communities.

Mr. Speaker, LAGI 2025 aligns seamlessly with our National Sustainable Tourism Framework which calls for tourism that regenerates rather than depletes. Through this initiative, renewable energy infrastructure becomes a cultural asset, an attraction that blends art, technology and tradition. Equally, this initiative advances the objectives of our National Development Plan, prioritising renewable energy, water security and community empowerment.

The winning designs, “The O” and “Ligavatuvece”, are practical prototypes capable of conducting, producing approximately 150 MWh and 120 MWh of clean energy annually and harvesting 1.2 million litres and 4.5 million litres of potable water each year, respectively. These are not ideas on paper; they have been engineered for implementation.

Marou Village in the Yasawa Islands will host the first LAGI installation in the Pacific. This is more than infrastructure, it is empowerment. It means children studying under lights powered by the sun, families drinking water harvested from the sky and a community thriving because of creativity and technology. Marou will become a national model, proving that small island communities can lead with solutions that are bold, beautiful and replicable across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, as we return from the 30th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP30), adopting LAGI demonstrates that Fiji's climate commitments are not confined to policy; they are visible, measurable and inspiring. Hosting this global competition signals that small island nations can lead with creativity and conviction. We are setting a benchmark for climate action that is visionary, inclusive and exportable to the world.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits to our tourism industry are profound. Today's travelers seek authentic environmental experiences and LAGI offers Fiji a unique advantage. These installations will become their destinations themselves, spaces where visitors learn, reflect and connect with the story of resilience. They will elevate Fiji's brand as the beating heart of the Blue Pacific, where sustainability is not a slogan but a lived reality.

Furthermore, LAGI resonates deeply with the Oceans of Peace Initiative and the broader Blue Pacific narrative. It celebrates oceanic heritage by championing solutions that protect it. It reminds us that peace is not passive, it is built through resilience, innovation, and shared responsibility. As the Pacific proverb says, “we are not defined by the waves that break us, but by the canoes we build to sail beyond them”. Sir, LAGI is one such canoe, a vessel of hope navigating the stormy seas of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, through LAGI 2025, Fiji will declare to the world that sustainability is not a burden, it is an opportunity. An opportunity to create jobs, attract investment, inspire innovation, and strengthen our cultural identity. It is an opportunity to lead. Today, through initiatives like LAGI, we

can shape our future where art and science converge, where culture and technology merge together, and where our islands stand resilient against the rising tide.

Mr. Speaker, LAGI 2025 is not just an exhibition, it is a blueprint for a future worthy of our children, worthy of our oceans and worthy of the name Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his answer to and explanation with respect to the LAGI 2025 Exhibition Programme. Under that programme it integrates renewable energy and also talks about sustainable architecture. Are there any opportunities that we have identified around the country in Fiji with respect to all that falls under the LAGI programme? I am talking about rainwater harvesting, et cetera. Have we identified them already? Are we in the process of whether they get assistance or guidance, or whichever is under that particular programme?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, as stated, Marou Village in Naviti is the first and it will be across the island as part of our sustainable framework.

What it is, in simple terms, is when you look at what you do to harvest water or renewable energy, you do it with a lot of art into it. It is not just putting up a tank or building whatever to harvest the part of the sun. It is done in a tasteful way. It becomes like a park. I have seen the design. I think if you have time, call in it into the Fiji Arts Council, their exhibition is there on what it is like to come to the village and see how they harvest the energy from the sun and how they harvest water from the sea or wherever from the sky; it is almost like a park. These types of projects are going to dominate most of our communities, but they will be done in a tasteful manner with a lot of art and creativity into it. To answer your question, it will spread across the island.

Monitoring Mechanism – Levy on School Enrolment
(Question No. 255/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the monitoring mechanism put in place by the Ministry to ensure schools do not levy parents and students for enrolment?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was just trying to find out whether to thank the honourable Member for the question or not. This is a question which is operational in nature, especially as he is fully aware that the information that he is requesting is available publicly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member is referring to memorandums of the Ministry of Education that are usually given out to heads of schools, reminding them of the importance of no levy to be charged to students, and that is publicly available. He is referring to the school handbook that details the financials of the school's operation, that is publicly available. If he is questioning about the role and responsibilities of the Heads of School, that is in their employment contract, which clearly stipulates that they should align themselves to the policies of the Ministry of Education, which includes the levying of students and parents for school enrolment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this has been made publicly in terms of the concerns that had been raised in previous years, that it should not be a precondition for enrolment, as we all know that free education is currently available in Fiji from Year 1 to Year 13, also in compliance of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 and also the National Development Goal.

All these things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are publicly available. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, that is something that is ongoing, in terms of the conduct of Heads of School, to ensure that the levying of levies like parents, teachers' levies and other levies that have been levied by the schools are not to be used as a precondition for enrolment.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has mentioned that School Heads were sent a memo not to levy. Recently, it was highlighted in the media, and you are fully aware, honourable Minister, that a school in Suva has implemented a levy of \$250. That means your School Heads are not adhering to the memo which was sent. Concerns have been raised after schools have implemented student levy. The reason that is given by the schools is that the Free Education Grant (FEG) is not enough to sustain high costs.

The FEG formula was revised five or six years ago. My question to the honourable Minister is, does the Ministry of Education have plans to revise and increase grants to schools so that students are not levied by their schools, as it is happening today? It started just recently.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I do not know whether to thank the honourable Member for his supplementary question or not. The levying of school, students and school levies, during his time, it was always there. When he was Head of School, students were levied during special occasions. When he was Director HR, he was allowing PTA levy, and it has always been there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have to agree whether PTA levy was given during that time. For this particular school, discussions are still ongoing. As I said, the intentions of the school is not to use it as a pre-condition for entry, but like every other school, this school has never made collections. So, we are trying to discuss with them to ensure that the parents are not victimised for enrolment in the new year, should they not been able to pay for whatever has been required but it is still work in progress. Nothing has been confirmed yet.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is like flogging a dead horse here. If you want to continue with your question, I will allow you.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the student levy, the enrolment levy was not in place. Now, the student enrolment levy just started recently. I read in the papers that it was highlighted in the media that this particular school has levied \$250 per child. That is a huge amount. That is the very reason why I am raising this question to the honourable Minister, if the monitoring of the enrolment levy can be done by the Ministry of Education, so that the students are not levied.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, do you wish to respond to that question? I do not know whether you have an answer to that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to reiterate that it is not the enrolment levy, it is a contribution that is voluntary to each and every student or parent at every school around Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- The answer from the honourable Minister is, it is a voluntary contribution. It should not be enforced on the parents. If you take that from the honourable Minister, you know where you should go then.

Honourable Sharma, do you wish to help in this discussion?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a supplementary question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, specifically a question, not a statement.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the memo that came out is and said by the honourable Minister, thank you for the clarity that it is not compulsory. I think that goes out to the parents who were worried when this memo came out.

When you talk about the enrolment of students for the new year, the support that was given previously was \$180. This Government came in with a \$20 top-up, I could say, \$200. Looking at these levies and the cost of living, is the Ministry going to consider increasing the back-to-school support per child?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer the honourable Member to Circular 110/2025. Maybe he can get clarity in terms of the question that has been asked.

Diagnostic Study of the Energy Sector
(Question No. 256/2025)

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the diagnostic study of the Energy Sector, including the status, outcomes and way forward?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to providing sustainable, reliable and affordable electricity to all Fijians to enhance its support to ensure socio-economic development, improving the quality of life. These commitments are clearly communicated and articulated in our national planning documents, including the National Development Plan (NDP) and frameworks.

The principal targets to be attained for the electricity sector are 100 percent for Fijians to get electricity access by 2029, 100 percent of electricity generation by 2035 will be through renewable energy, and 36 percent reduction of Green House Gase (GHG) emissions, as part of Fiji's climate commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are ambitious targets which cannot be achieved overnight. However, with the right investment environment and with supporting legislative and regulatory frameworks, we can make a significant leap towards achieving them.

In terms of the study that I have mentioned, the Legislative and Regulatory Gap Analysis to Facilitate the Just Inclusive Transition for the Energy Sector was initiated in response to Fiji's slow progress in transitioning to renewable electricity generation. In addition, private sector and Independent Power Producer (IPP) participation in renewable energy has been low. In fact, over the past decade, only one genuine IPP from Korea has signed the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) and established the 12-megawatt Nabou Green Energy Limited in Sigatoka. This has increased the total number of IPPs to three, which includes Fiji Sugar Corporation and Tropik Wood Industries Limited. There is a development of a 4-megawatt Agrophotovoltaic Project in Ovalau, which will operate and sell power to EFL once completed but has faced delays due to COVID and other logistical issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the study which I have mentioned has been completed and its findings have been submitted to and endorsed by Cabinet, that is, the Legislative and Regulatory Gap Analysis, which is basically to ensure there is facilitation to just transition and renewable energy.

The study completed comprehensive and tangible results, and a multi-faceted approach was adopted. The findings of the study, basically, are as follows:

- (1) The Electricity Act lacks definitions for key terms such as “renewable energy” and “indigenous sources”. This absence creates uncertainty around what qualifies as a renewable energy project under the law.
- (2) The objectives of the Act do not include any reference to implementing Fiji's National Renewable Energy targets to its international commitments.
- (3) Under the current legal framework, the Ministry, which is the implementing agency of the National Energy Policy, is not granted any governance authority of the electricity sector in general.
- (4) EFL is granted the exclusive rights for the transition and supply of electricity, as well as exclusivity as a licensed retailer/seller. Even in areas not currently served by EFL's grid, such as outer islands, this broad exclusivity may hinder efforts to improve energy access.
- (5) The delegation of regulatory functions to EFL by the regulator appears to contradict section 4(f) of the Electricity Act 2017, which emphasises the importance of maintaining independence in terms of regulatory matters.
- (6) Section 6(2)(b) of the Act may unintentionally discourage individuals or businesses from generating their own electricity to use on their premises, potentially limiting small-scale off-grid renewable energy adoption.
- (7) Section 57 gives the regulator authority to set a maximum price for electricity sold to consumers. However, it does not grant power to regulate pricing arrangements between IPPs and EFL, such as setting minimum or maximum charges for electricity purchase.
- (8) There is a narrow and distinctive focus on IPPs in the Electricity Act 2017. The EFL's exclusive right to transmit and supply electricity meant that all IPPs must enter into a PPA with EFL to sell any electricity that they might generate. Without transparent and favourable PPA terms with EFL, IPPs may face uncertainty, hindering private investments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, competition and effective oversight are lacking and without reform, Fiji risks falling far short of its renewable energy targets. The recommendations from the study which were submitted and approved by Cabinet, Government will take two key actions below to promote investment and accelerate the transition:

- (1) Establishment of the Energy Investment Advisory Committee (EIAC). This is an immediate intervention which will improve coordination between Government agencies, EFL and the private sector, and to streamline permitting and approval process for renewable energy projects to be managed from the Ministry through the Department of Energy.

The EIAC, which requires no significant financial resources or legislative changes, will operate as a single-window platform, bringing together key Ministries, Investment Fiji, Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) and development partners. Its main role is to enhance communication, reduce project delays and guide developers on regulatory compliance. The first meeting is planned for early December.

- (2) Most importantly, the review of the Electricity Act 2017, due to the significant gaps identified, as I have mentioned, a thorough legal review is required to determine whether the Act should be amended or fully overhauled. Cabinet has endorsed the undertaking of this review.

We remain mindful, of course, of EFL's obligations to its stakeholders and the need to ensure that its ability to provide reliable and affordable electricity is not jeopardized. It is a performing commercial operation which we should continue to support. Therefore, a balanced approach will be necessary to support renewable energy investment while recognising EFL's commercial responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, the study has provided a clear and evidence-based understanding of the challenges that have slowed Fiji's renewable energy transition. Government needs to take decisive steps to modernise the sector and support greater private sector participation, especially IPP in renewable energy. These transitions will help ensure that Fiji advances towards its national renewable energy and decarbonisation targets, secures a reliable and affordable electricity supply for all Fijians, and builds a more resilient and sustainable energy in the future.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, thank you for that explanation. My question relates to what methodologies and tools were used coming up with this assessment that have been done with respect to the diagnostic study of the Energy Sector. It is to do with a huge sector in our country and we would love to know what methodologies were used.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, from my knowledge, it has been done in collaboration with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Basically, it is a regulatory and legislative gap analysis, looking at the components or provision of electricity, the role of EFL in that and, of course, the Department of Energy.

There were about two workshops conducted with all stakeholders and from the feedback and the various consultations which were done, the conclusions, which I read out, were formulated. It was done with full consultations with all stakeholders, moving forward in a systematic and methodical manner. It is a very sensitive issue. We do understand EFL is operating commercially in a sound manner, so the progress in this needs to be done in a careful and considerate manner. That is why there are two steps, to:

- (1) clear the blockages that are there, enabling especially communications and information which is lacking; and
- (2) the review the Act.

From my understanding, we would basically ensure that the various functions are clear - generation, transmission, distribution and, of course, as already mentioned, the regulatory side from the supply of electricity, where the Ministry comes in which, at the moment, is a bit confusing. The Ministry, as an arm of the Government, needs to have that enabling environment to ensure that its perform its oversight and regulatory functions.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to IPPs, did the study also incorporate why is it that we are not attracting big IPPs into Fiji and how much is actually being paid to IPPs? It is an area that can be a potential amount of investment, especially for renewable energy. I think the issue really arises from not enough investments from IPPs and they are not getting enough returns from EFL. Did the study incorporate a review of that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, it incorporates some of the issues we are facing, for

example, in terms of the facilitations, communications or information they need when they want to invest. Not only that, but as I had already mentioned, the role of EFL in terms of its role as a partner in that, because it is a generator as well as a competitor, so that is the issue to those who want to generate electricity.

The other one I did not mention was the technical side, how will those generating electricity feed into the grid, of course, the pricing mechanism of that, but also when incorporating generation into the grid, the technical compatibility between the grid and whatever technical specifications are used by the generator for renewable energy because some might be a risk to the current grid.

Those are the kinds of things which are taken into account. However, on the technical side, when we do the review, there needs to be some sort of process in managing that, and that needs to be made clear to the IPPs. At the moment, the information is not communicated clearly, there is backlog and other issues which have been identified in the report, apart from the technical aspects.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change has just submitted our Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in the recent COP. I would like to ask the question, how much of what you are mentioning is included in the most recent NDC, particularly for the energy sector?

If I may add, honourable Minister, Sir, there is a lot of frustration in the non-parties. We acknowledge the efforts that are being taken now by Government, but what can we do to speed things up? I am aware of major projects and investors are just going around in circles - Hydro Taveuni, there is one now in Vuda, and they are just going between EFL and now referred to FCCC. How can we speed things up?

The parties have made the commitment in our NDC, but there is a lot of frustrations in the non-parties. It is the non-parties who are going to implement our commitment to the Paris Agreement. Thank you very much.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- As I have mentioned, we are immediately establishing the Energy Investment Advisory Committee who will sit in the next two weeks - first week of December, to address and facilitate the best ways forward. Yes, it is a concern and an urgent matter.

We are also placing the review of the Act as priority to go concurrently with that Committee. So, this is something that is definitely a priority for Government and we give our commitment to take this forward.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 10.39 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.15 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I will reshuffle the order of the Questions this morning for some urgent reasons. I have been asked to, and I am satisfied that it is quite in order for me to do that, in which case, if you will allow me, I will, firstly, call on honourable Rinesh Sharma to ask Question No. 259 of 2025, before I go back to the other two Questions.

Long Term Strategies – Land Lease Expiration
(Question No.259/2025)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the long-term strategies that are in place to address land lease expiration issues affecting many sugarcane farmers?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must thank the honourable Member for the question. Before I reply properly to you, I would like to announce that the Ba Mill, which is the Rarawai Mill, is almost ready for operation. They are doing further testing today and, hopefully, by 10th December, crushing will resume at Rarawai Mill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to share something I encountered last Friday in Lautoka. We had the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Fiji Sugar Corporation, and we happen to have a guest called Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, who was a small shareholder representing the National Farmers Union. Now, when my chairman asked him, "Mr. Chaudhry, should we have a mill at Penang? He said, "No, there should be no mill at Penang." I should have taken an audio recording on that. The second question he asked, "Should we have only one mill in Viti Levu? He said, "Yes." He asked again, "Where should it be?" He answered, "First, close the Lautoka Mill and set up a new mill at Nawaicoba."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nawaicoba does not have sugarcane, it does not even have cassava there. So, I will put on record that this man, who was supposed to be a leader of farmers, instead of building mills, is trying to close mills.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reply to honourable Sharma's question, and I thank him for the question. To be specific, I wish to emphasise that land tenure remains one of the most critical challenges facing the sugar industry today. It is an issue that threatens the long-term sustainability of the sector and must be addressed collectively by both sides of this House. Whether we are speaking for the sugar or non-sugar sector, the future of both sectors depends on a secure and practicable access to land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is fully aware of the difficulties associated with expiring agricultural leases, particularly those affecting our sugarcane farmers. While Crown leases pose less of a challenge, leases administered by the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTLTB) has been an area of concern.

Over the next 10 years, a total of 2,362 agricultural leases under TLTB are due to expire, the majority of which are currently under sugarcane cultivation. Of this, 1,328 leases are already in the renewal process. These are farmers who have utilised their land for agriculture, as required under the lease conditions, and 466 leases are currently not being renewed due to a number of issues, primarily, non-utilisation of leased land for agricultural purposes, land identified by the Land Owning Unit for future development and the land set aside for the growing *mataqali* members. The remaining leases

are undergoing inspection, consultations and due diligence as part of the renewal assessment.

Support to the farmers facing lease expiry has been a concrete step to support both, existing and new farmers. Through our New Farmers and Lease Premium Assistance Programme, the Ministry has invested \$2.7 million, supporting 202 new entrants in the sugar industry, and 385 farmers through the lease premium assistance. Under this programme, the Ministry contributes 30 percent of the lease premium, or \$7,500, which is lower. In addition, one of our key institutions, the Sugar Cane Growers Fund, provides affordable loans for leases and renewals at an interest rate of 4.5 percent, which remains one of the lowest loan rates available to the farmers in Fiji today.

Government's collaboration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addressing lease expiry requires collaboration across multiple sectors. The Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and iTaukei Land Trust Board. Through this collaboration, we are in the process of reactivating the Lease Renewal Task Force, initially led by the Ministry of Finance, which will provide a more comprehensive, long-term, and co-ordinated solution to the lease expiry issues affecting farmers.

Ensuring sustainable use of land, while my Ministry remains fully committed to supporting our farmers, we also recognise that lease renewals must be grounded in productivity, compliance and long-term viability. Only those farmers who are able to fully utilise the land for agricultural production should continue to hold agricultural leases. Where growers are no longer productive or where no viable succession plan exists, the responsible course of action is to relinquish the agriculture leases and allow other committed and capable farmers the opportunity to lease and cultivate the farms. Such growers may instead opt for a residential lot if they wish to continue residing in that area.

Additional long-term strategies, the Ministry, together with our stakeholders is also pursuing other strategies to reduce the impact of lease expiry on the sugar sector. These strategies are strengthening the notification systems for lease expiry, through which, farmers are now being notified earlier and encouraged to begin renewable processes well ahead of expiry dates; encouraging farmers to have a succession plan; building partnerships with family members on enabling roles to sustain cane production; and promoting cluster and co-operative farming models, which allows a more efficient use of land, shared resources and improve production, thereby, strengthening farmers' eligibility for renewal of leases.

The Ministry, in collaboration with the Sugar Cane Growers Council, had already initiated a share farming programme through which inactive or abandoning farms have been brought back into production by pairing willing growers with available farmland. In addition to the current strategies, the Ministry is preparing a policy paper proposing that the Government, through the Ministry of Sugar Industry, assume a role of a head lessee for designated agricultural land and thereafter sublease this land to the sugarcane farmers. This proposed model offers several important advantages for long-term sustainability of the sugar industry.

Firstly, it provides a greater security and a continuity of land for cane production by preventing sudden disruption arising from non-renewals or disputes. It also helps the fragmentation of the production of agricultural land, ensuring that these areas remain dedicated to farming.

Secondly, the model allows land to be allocated to the most committed and capable farmers based on clear performance of criteria. It strengthens accountability, removes the burden of goodwill payments, and makes access to the land more attainable, particularly for the young and new farmers who often cannot afford such additional costs.

Thirdly, the model enhances our planning and modernisation of efforts. With Government's coordination of land blocks, we can better support mechanisation, enforce essential farming standards, and implement infrastructure such as drainage, access roads and irrigation more efficiently. At present, the split between the growers, neighbours and families over boundaries, access roads and fallow lands are common. Appliance leasing would reduce these conflicts by standardising land management practices.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this approach protects the interests of the landowners by ensuring the land is utilised - production increase transparently and sustainably. It also strengthens the entire supply chain, provides confidence to the millers and growers, and helps secure the long-term future of the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this proposed model is currently undergoing consultation within the sugar institutions. A wider consultation with the farmers will also be undertaken. Once this process is completed, all bills have been considered, the proposal will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry remains firmly committed to ensuring that production, compliance, and dedicated farmers are supported throughout the lease renewal processes, and the long-term viability of the sugar industry is protected. Through targeted assistance, stronger inter-agency co-ordination and proactive long-term planning, we are confident that Fiji can effectively address the challenges posed by expiring land leases and build a more secure and resilient future for our cane growers.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his response. I think it is our responsibility as Opposition to find concrete solutions for the sugar industry and our farmers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister is correct about the expiry of leases and, as read in the media, that 52 leases will expire by next year in the Northern Division and 89 leases will expire by 2030. Can the honourable Minister update Parliament if there are any standardised lease security agreements where FSC can acquire *iTaukei* and non-*iTaukei* land that meets FSC's targeted outcome for its sugar production? Basically, FSC being able to access that much of land to ensure that we can have this much of sugar produced and, of course, the future of the sugar industry is in ethanol production, as we have spoken about already.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said, the discussions are ongoing. It is not a very simple issue, honourable Rinesh, and we are very much concerned about the sugarcane production. As much as we want to increase, the land issue becomes a stumbling block. But, yes, the discussions are ongoing, and we are very hopeful that we can discuss with the *iTaukei* Minister and his Ministry to resolve the problem at the soonest.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, the honourable Minister has mentioned that in 10 years' time around 2,000 leases will expire. He has also mentioned that there are some bad farmers who are not performing but reside on the land. If those farmers who are not performing have to go and new farmers will need to come in, what will happen to their residential buildings on the land?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said earlier, we need quality farmers, producing at least a minimum of 300 tonnes of cane. He cannot be sitting on a 50-tonne cane per hectare. We are emphasizing to farmers, "if you are not willing to work, you can buy that small plot where your house is and give the land to someone else who is willing to work on the farm and increase the production."

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, of the 2,362 leases that are expected to

expire in the next 10 years, what percentage of that number of leases is State lease on State land? If I may add to that, what are some of the major challenges that you see with tenants occupying State leases as compared to iTLTB leases?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think State land renewals are pretty easy as compared to *iTaukei* land leases. We are not having too much of a problem with that, and I cannot give you a figure now. Can I be allowed to supply that later on?

MR. SPEAKER.- The reason, honourable Bala, why I smiled when I called, was because this morning, I was again with my taxi driver and he asked whether honourable Minister Singh will be asking a question and whether you will follow it with a question. So, his got his answer. Honourable Minister, you are excused to leave the Chambers.

Transportation of Livestock to Outer Islands
(Question No. 257/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament when will the farmers from the maritime areas be allowed to take livestock to the islands?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, I thank honourable Semi Koroilavesau for raising the question regarding when farmers from maritime areas will be allowed to transport livestock to islands.

The concern of restrictions highlights the challenges faced by our farmers in the maritime islands and underscores the need for timely support and clarity in facilitating agricultural activities across our island communities. This is an important matter touching on agricultural livelihood, human and animal health as well as national biosecurity. Prior to modern biosecurity legislation, livestock movement in Fiji was less regulated. So, outbreaks of serious Zoonotic Contagious Animal Diseases poses a significant threat to Fiji, the livestock sector and human health.

In response to this growing risk, Fiji modernized its Animal and Plant Quarantine Laws in 2008, and Biosecurity Promulgation Act 2008 was enacted to replace earlier quarantine, plant and animal disease laws including the Animal Importation Act and several contagious disease regulations. This reform established the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) with a mandate to manage biosecurity risks at the border and across the islands. Since then, BAF has used its powers to declare biosecurity control areas that have certain disease or pest risks. These declarations give the legal basis, controlling the movement of animals, plants and their products into, out of, or within such areas. This includes all areas of the main islands and the maritime zone.

Over time, there have been biosecurity emergency declarations, especially for diseases such as bovine tuberculosis and bovine brucellosis, which have restricted the movement of cattle in Fiji. For example, in 2024, the declaration was made that any movement of cattle and calves within Fiji is restricted, strictly prohibited, unless prior authorisation is given by Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the strict approach of livestock movement includes the main islands and the maritime islands and is based on several factors and these are:

- (1) Disease risks and containment. Disease such as bovine tuberculosis and bovine brucellosis

represents serious biosecurity threats. This disease can infect humans and animals, reduces productivity and the livelihood of farmers.

- (2) Preserving island specific biosecurity status. Many of Fiji's maritime islands are relatively isolated and currently may not host certain livestock diseases. However, unregulated movement of infected livestock into clean areas could introduce disease to those previously uninfected areas. By regulating livestock movement, the government aims to protect these islands as disease free zones and limits the spread of disease as well as contain them during outbreaks.
- (3) Economic trade consideration. Maintaining a strong, biosecurity regime helps protect the livestock industry, economic viability and the outbreak of disease reduces productivity, increases culling costs and can undermine export and trade opportunities.
- (4) Legal and institutional mandate. BAF is legally empowered under the Biosecurity Act to enforce movement restrictions. These are not discretionary or ad hoc. They rest on statutory authority. The Act provides not only for declared control areas, but also for regulated orders under section 71, managing how, when and under what conditions animals may move within such areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Biosecurity Act 2008, while not imposing an outright ban on movement, serves as the primary legislation governing both international and domestic movement of animal and animal product by placing strict control to manage biosecurity risk. There are also surveillance and testing mechanisms. For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways works with BAF on a three clear test approach for brucellosis and tuberculosis before a farm can be confirmed clear.

Protection of Animals Act 1954 also specifically have provisions on the transportation of livestock by sea, stipulating how sheep, goats, pigs and poultry should be penned, watered and fed during long maritime journeys. When cattle are transported by sea in inter-island or coastal vessels, each animal must be provided, recommended transportation standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while some stakeholders may refer to a ban, there is no blanket prohibition of the livestock movement to and from maritime islands. The control is placed on precautionary and risk-base, rooted in sound biosecurity theory, and legal powers are conferred by statute. The Ministry, together with BAF continues to work with farmers, provincial authorities and our own communities to manage and, where possible, enable safe livestock transportation under regulated conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Biosecurity Act 2008 gives BAF clear power to declare control areas, regulate movements and impose conditions, and enforce compliance to guard against disease and incursion and spread. These measures protect human and animal health, farmers livelihoods and broader agriculture economy and national biosecurity.

Moving forward, the Ministry, together with BAF, remains committed to working with other communities and livestock producers to ensure the safe transportation of livestock into the islands. The safe transportation of livestock produce will ensure disease risks are minimised while enabling economies to actively contribute.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I thank the honourable Minister for his answer to the question that I have raised. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the issues that has been raised by farmers on the maritime islands is the process involved in clearing animals to be transported for farming. One of these, I think the honourable Minister and I have discussed this, they should give an area where the cattle or sheep is going to be brought from, so biosecurity can clear that area, and they will be able

to approve animals from that area to be transported to the maritime islands.

I wanted to ask the honourable Minister, is there a possibility for the Ministry of Agriculture holding a stock that is free from diseases that the maritime island farmers can come and buy, because the process is quite long, and at times the questions that have been posed have not been answered, thus delay the transportation of cattle and other animals.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government stations are normally tested free for the disease, and that is where they can source livestock from. However, due to the constraints that we have, including space and funding to raise enough to service our all farmers, the Ministry has in the past, established multiplication farms where they continuously monitor diseases.

As I mentioned, the three test requirements that we have for farmers to pass the three clear tests, they are given a status of clear farms and that is where they can source their animal livestock from. The information on the farms that are clear, are available with the Ministry. Often times, farmers normally look for the other farmers to source livestock from, but we have programmes that require regular testing. This is pre-status where farmers can buy from.

HON. V. NATH.- Has the Ministry done any assessment regarding the economic impact on these islands?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Economic impact in terms of production, there is quite a lot of potential for livestock production in the maritime islands. But there are also a lot of risks when it comes to disease incursion in islands. Controlling diseases on small islands are much expensive than controlling diseases on the main islands, simply because we are faced with difficulties in the transportation cost. Analysis on the effect of both livestock production and the impact of diseases had already been made in the past, and that is how we are recommending for some areas where they can produce livestock, especially in the maritime.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, while we appreciate all the efforts taken by the Ministry to control the spread of these diseases, one of the big risks in this is stray animals. You very well understand honourable Minister, how is the Ministry addressing this issue and what are the expectations as well, particularly on the owners of these stray animals?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a funded project for stray animal control. This includes control of stray dogs, which causes a lot of losses to small ruminants, but also we have a capital programme for control of wild cattle, those that normally pose, not only risk to the lives of motorists, but also the spread of the disease. We have a special team that has been used in other districts of the bigger islands to control stray animals.

Progress on Implementation of SP-MIS and IBMS
(Question No. 258/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on the progress made in the development and implementation of the Social Protection Management Information System (SP-MIS) and the Integrated Beneficiary Management System (IBMS) in improving the efficiency and delivery of Fiji's social protection programmes?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for this

important question regarding the digital transformation of Fiji's social protection programmes and the opportunity to update the Parliament on progress made in developing the Social Protection Management Information System (SP-IMS) and the Integrated Beneficiary Management Information System (IBMS).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the Government's commitment to strengthening service delivery, improving targeted accuracy, and modernising the administration of our social protection programmes, our Ministry has embarked on a major digital transformation under the Social Protection Reform Agenda. This activity focusses on replacing paper-based systems with a modern, fully digitised platform that will support efficient, transparent, and timely social assistance delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this digital transformation agenda is fully aligned with the National Digital Strategy, which is the National Digital Strategy of 2025-2030, which emphasises strengthening digital Government services, improving data governance, promoting interoperability across systems, and ensuring that digital tools deliver faster, more inclusive, and more citizen-centered public services. It is useful to first provide some background on how this digital transformation emerged and took shape. In addition to the recurring audit issues highlighted and reported every year on the management of the delivery of social protection programmes, and as an outcome of a fiduciary risk assessment of Fiji's social assistance schemes report in assessment, in June 2020 the Australian Government provided the Government of Fiji with \$2.16 million to support the Ministry's social protection reforms.

In late 2022, in partnership with DFAT and its flagship programme, the Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP), I will refer to it in later part of this address, a number of specialised roles and technical assistance services were engaged to undertake a detailed operational and technical review of the six key social assistance schemes administered by the Department of Social Welfare, or now known as Social Protection. Following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including beneficiaries of social assistance schemes themselves, the technical review report was completed in May 2023 and subsequently approved by the Cabinet. The review provided our Ministry with recommendations for key operational and policy reforms to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the social assistance scheme.

One of the core recommendations of the technical review was indeed the need to design and implement an IBMS to strengthen the delivery of Fiji's social assistance schemes. However, while this comprehensive IBM solution will represent an impressive achievement for Fiji, the technical review identified that a more immediate gap was in the area of data management, digitisation of beneficiary data and data protection, which all needed urgent priority attention.

Some of the Ministry's online system crashed in 2020 and some processes were reverted to manual processes. Therefore, in 2024, as a first step the priority for the Ministry was to develop an interim IT solution, the SP-MIS. Our digital reforms are being implemented in two stages, the SPMIS. The first stage involves establishing an interim SP-MIS to digitise core beneficiary information and support the Ministry's priority operational needs.

I am pleased to inform Parliament that the interim programme has now been successfully built, tested and handed over to our Ministry on the government's secure Govnet server aligned with national standards for data security and digital governance and is hosted at the Government ITC Data Centre. This system is now integrated with the Ministry of Justice's Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) system through the Digital Exchange Platform (DXP).

The social protection reform teams including officials from our Ministry of Finance and IT teams are currently conducting national user - training across all 21 District Welfare Offices, ensuring

frontline staff are fully trained to operate the system. Once the digitisation and uploading of all beneficiary records are completed, which is a process that is now in its final stage, the interim SP-MIS will become fully operational by next month. This will mark a major step towards improving data accuracy, reducing administrative delays, and strengthening oversight of programme delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the nationwide training rollout for the interim SP-MIS, the team also undertook a rapid IT needs assessment across all 21 District Welfare Offices. This assessment identified several operational challenges including aging and insufficient computer equipment, limited availability of replacement hardware and the need for network upgrades in certain locations to support stable and secure system access. These infrastructure gaps pose constraints to fully realising the benefits of digital transformation. The Ministry is working with the partners to address this challenge to ensure a smooth rollout of the new system.

The IBMS is the second stage of this reform; for a more comprehensive and strategic integrated system. The IBMS is designed to be the long-term digital backbone of Fiji's Social Protection System. It will support end-to-end administration including applications, assessments, payments, reconciliations, monitoring and a grievance handling process across all. This will enhance the full system design requirements for IBMS finalised and formally endorsed. Our team of software developers is now building the system, and the first batch of modules was reviewed by the Ministry late last month.

The IBMS is on track for implementation in 2026 and once completed will integrate all beneficiary data into a single and secure modern platform. This will significantly enhance programme efficiency, minimise errors, improve coordination across schemes and strengthen our ability to respond quickly during emergencies or shocks. It will also integrate with the external system that will support with validating the eligibility criteria of each application.

Mr. Speaker, the progress of the SP-MIS and IBMS advances several core commitments of Fiji's national digital strategy:

- (1) seamless and citizen-centric services;
- (2) faster processing;
- (3) fewer in-person visits and more transparent case management for beneficiaries;
- (4) stronger data systems and analytics;
- (5) better visibility of beneficiary profiles;
- (6) reduced duplication; and
- (7) enhanced ability to evaluate programme effectiveness.

Improved interoperability - the IBMS is being designed to interface with other government platforms contributing to whole of government digital integration. Digital inclusion — that means training across district welfare offices ensures frontline staff and the community serve benefit from enhanced digital capability and hosting on Govnet ensures alignment with national cyber security and data protection standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the digital transformation of Fiji's social protection programme, is one of the most modernisation reforms within the social sector underway in the ministry. By transitioning from fragmented paper-based processes to a modern digital ecosystem, we are moving towards a faster service delivery, improved targeting, better transparency, and stronger accountability.

In parallel, as part of the reform, the ministry will need a functional review to strengthen role descriptions, clarify responsibilities, and enhance internal technical capacity to manage and maintain the new data systems. This review will ensure the Department of Social Protection is also equipped

with the right skills and organisational structure to sustain the effective digitalisation of Fiji's social protection system. The interim SP-MIS and the forthcoming IBMS together represent a major investment in building our most resilient, efficient, and people-centred social protection system, one that is better able to support our most vulnerable households today, well into the future.

The Ministry is grateful to the development partners, in particular the Government of Australia and relevant stakeholders, for their continued support to the ministry's ambitious reform agenda, providing access to critical funding for projects, expertise, and linkages to other systems to strengthen the delivery of social protection in Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, a small question - will this mean that we will have a proper, fully integrated beneficiary register for the beneficiaries, in terms of that particular register and a social register?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there will be a fully-fledged register with a full profile. Right now, we have to keep chasing data, for example, when someone dies and a death certificate is not submitted, we are not aware. So now, with the integration with BDMS and all the Government systems, it will be a fully profiled system that is easy to access across the Government.

HON. V. LAL.- I thank the honourable Minister for moving towards digitisation, but we know there are certain areas where there is no internet connection. How is the Minister going to deal with that?

HON. S. KIRAN.- We have very good connectivity now, as we have been hearing from Starlink, and we are working with Starlink in some of the maritime areas where data connectivity is an issue. It is part of the entire reform that these are looked at, not only the connectivity, but also the infrastructure. As I shared, some of the computer systems are quite outdated. They are all being looked at as part of this reform.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This is now technically a data repository, how are we going to address the security issues with respect to that particular data? Especially because we are going to be using someone else access to the internet, like Starlink. Remember, data is critical and better than gold at the end of the day. How are we going to ensure that it is protected at all times?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I said this will be in line with a digital strategy, national digital strategy, which takes into account the entire cybersecurity and data security. This is not being done in isolation by a ministry. It is done with the ITC and with the experts to make sure it is protected.

Progress of the Survey of Unsurveyed Mataqali Land
(Question No. 260/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on the progress of the survey of unsurveyed *mataqali* land around Fiji that is being conducted by the Native Land and Fisheries Commission?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Kuridrani for the question. Lately, we have experienced an increase in the request for surveying the unsurveyed land, especially in the areas where development has come up. Most of these unsurveyed lands are also mangrove areas. When

they made the *yalayala vaka-Viti*, they demarcate some small islands along those *veitiri*. That is one of the challenges that is being faced by our surveyors and lately the areas that have not been completed are Serua, Namosi, Lau Group, Cikobia and parts of Ba and Kadavu.

Throughout Fiji, there are about 1,726 parcels of land that have yet to be surveyed. From 2011 to now, the surveyors have only completed 23 percent and about 77 percent have not yet been surveyed. The issue with surveying the unsurveyed land is that once there is a dispute, our surveyors will stop. They will come back until they sort out the dispute, then they will go back to survey the land.

We do not know the size of each of the 1,726 parcels, and what we have done in the last few years is because of the confirmation of chiefs, hopefully with the chiefly titles being confirmed, that will help with the discussions regarding unsurveyed land. We also bought some new equipment for the surveyors, which will speed up the way they carry out the survey of unsurveyed land, and also in the last budget, we bought some dedicated vehicles for that.

I think in the last two years we have seen a lot of requests on the demarcations of those already being surveyed. It is very hard for them to find surveyors, and the developments coming in where they want to develop their land. So, we also allocate some of our team to the demarcation team.

Also, last year, because of the need to survey the mahogany area, we sent some of our surveyors to Vanua Levu to fast-track the survey of the land in the mahogany areas. We will try our best to continue to improve if there is a need to put additional surveyors and bring in new surveyors, we will do that. However, the need for surveyors in Fiji is now quite high.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question is just the accessibility of this data - boundary maps to the land owning units. Is it available to them, or where can they go to access these boundary maps for those that have been surveyed?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the maps for those that have already been surveyed are being transferred to iTLTB, they have it. It is also with the iTaukei Land and Fisheries Commission, and the Ministry of Lands. The one that is not yet being surveyed, as I have already mentioned, it is only written, *yalayala vakavanua*. This *yalayala vakavanua* or when the surveyor goes, there will be two teams. The *butu vanua* in front, or the demarcations in front, and the surveyor coming after them. Once only the *butu vanua* is satisfied, then the surveyor can do their work. If there is any small dispute, they will come back.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, this is one area that has caused some problems. My question relates especially out in the foreshore area, sometimes there is an island that existed many, many years ago, and it gets buried, and the rising sea levels have caused it to get buried. I know this question impinges on both the Ministers responsible for lands. When we are doing the demarcation and when the survey is being done, are we ensuring that our landowners are protected in terms of their right to that particular island, be it small or big, that may have been buried because of rising sea levels? Is that being marked on the survey maps as something that exists, but it is underwater?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, are you in a position to answer? I know it is a complicated question. It is a bit of a legal issue also.

HON. I. VASU.- With the current climate change and the effect of what is happening now, the survey team or the *butu vanua* will be relying on the names of the small islands and everything like that. If it is right and with their *yalayala vaka-Viti*, then they will recognise it. In some places

like Fantasy Island, there were a few islands that were being disputed and ended up in court. Those are the challenges faced by our surveyors out there and the *veitarogi vanua*.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am wondering how the honourable Minister proposed to deal with issues where it is traditionally known that land belongs to a particular *mataqali*, but now it has been assigned to another one. For example, the airport in Lakeba. This is an area that is under a lot of contention right now. How is it that you propose to do this when it is known that the land traditionally belonged to one *yavusa*, but now it has been transferred to another?

HON. I. VASU.- There are a few that are like that in Fiji. We are very thankful for the review of the iTaukei Land and Fisheries Commission to come up with ways to deal with it. Very soon, we will put up a paper to Cabinet on the review that will be able to address some of the areas that have been raised by honourable Usamate.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support that agriculture and fisheries is Fiji's backbone, but unutilised land are missed opportunities for growth and prosperity for the landowners and Fiji's economy. In aspects of reserved and de-reserved land, is the Ministry looking forward to a formulation of a policy or a provision that ensures that land must be utilised within a certain period of time for development? Is there a support structure in the future that will help the landowners with entrepreneurship and further development? Why I say this there was a scenario in Lautoka, 10 acres of flat land, owner is in New Zealand, and only one quarter of that land has sugar cane. That person sitting overseas is typing on Facebook about how Fiji should be. Those are the things where I would like, if the Ministry can provide oversight and look into land that is not being utilised, is holding this country back.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, do you wish to answer because a two-pronged question was asked. There is only one specifically. A supplementary to a supplementary is the one you may ignore.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, these type of absentee leases is addressed by iTLTB which takes time. They can cancel the lease or allocate just the portion that they are using, return the other portion so that other members can lease portions that are not being used.

Age Limit Increase for Bus Fare Assistance Programme
(Question No. 261/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on the reason why age limit for those receiving bus fare assistance increased from 60 to 65 years old?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the question from the honourable Member regarding the increase in age eligibility. The decision to increase the age eligibility of transport assistance scheme from 60 to 65 years was made after a comprehensive review of Fiji's Social Protection system. This was announced in 2024-2025 National Budget to harmonise the transport assistance scheme with the social pension scheme, which already begins at the age 65.

Aligning these two programmes simplifies administration, reduces duplication and ensures a more coherent structure of support for older persons. We must also consider demographic trends with life expectancy gradually increasing. A lot of citizens remain economically active, especially since retirement age has been increased to 60 now. As of November 2025, 58,414 older persons aged

65 years and above are currently benefiting under the Social Pension Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, I just spoke about the Social Protection Reforms guided by the Social Assistance Policy that also informed this decision. This reform includes the introduction of cash top-up option, harmonisation of age thresholds and other operational improvements to ensure programmes are accessible and responsive.

Reviews conducted by the Ministry with support from the Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP) in 2023, as well as assistance by the Poverty Monitoring Unit highlighted a number of challenges, including overlap in the target group. The older persons also benefiting from disability allowance, so harmonising eligibility and registration process reduces the administrative barriers and improving access, especially for those at higher risk of exclusion.

Mr. Speaker, this reform is consistent with the global trends. Many countries have increased eligibility age for old age benefits in response to rising life expectancy and economic pressures. Fiji is aligning with international best practices while ensuring that reforms remain tailored to a national context that meets the needs of our people. We will continue to progress as we move along to see how best we can serve our vulnerable population based on the realities on the ground and best practices with the guidance of our technical expertise.

HON. J. USAMATE.- There has been considerable consternation by those above the age of 60 who were looking forward to getting that assistance. Is there anything that the honourable Minister is looking to address those particular issues?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Thank you for the question. I understand where you are coming from. I just shared about the different social assistance schemes we have. For those above 60 who may have different challenges, either they have disability issues, or they have special vulnerabilities with poverty, they do fall under some of our other social protection schemes. We have assisted people with not only income generation but also have assisted them with the family assistance scheme. Before, when you are 60, you can automatically apply. Now, if there is an urgent need, they go under different protection systems, and only above 65, if they are not on pension, they can go onto this scheme.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know there are a lot of people who above 65 years and who are very well qualified to receive this bus assistance but they are not receiving it. There are some people who also qualify but they are not receiving it on time. Can the honourable Minister explain this, please?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, if you know of people above 55 who are in need, they could be referred to our system. It does not mean if you are above 55, you do not have pension, you will automatically get this assistance. Like I said, we will refer them to different social protection schemes. Bus fare is for above 65. Feel free to refer cases which you know are very poor or cannot afford but the actual eligibility will be from above 65.

Positive Impacts of the Rural Housing Programme
(Question No. 262/2025)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the positive impact of the Rural Housing Programme to the rural and maritime communities since its reinstatement in 2023?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question and welcome this opportunity to provide an update on the progress of the Rural Housing Assistance Programme since its recent statement in 2023. This Government has made a clear strategic decision that rural housing must evolve from low-impact welfare scheme into a core driver of rural transformation, poverty reduction and climate resilience. I can make the bold claim that in the lives of those who have been assisted it has been transformational.

This became the foundation of the comprehensive re-engineering of the programme through its policy design, delivery mechanism, affordability structure, resilience standards and economic empowerment components and the results speak for themselves. Over 310 homes completed to-date; 92 more households targeted this financial year - a shift towards engineer certified disaster resilient designs and a new assistance model that is inclusive, pro-poor and realistic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programme reform was not optional, it was strategically and economically unavoidable. Within just two months of reinstatement, the Ministry received 665 applications. This was not a normal demand, it was a national sign, a signal of unmet need accumulated over years of programme stagnation. The data confronting us was compelling. Building materials for a standard rural home increased by 153 percent between 2014 and 2024, yet the contributions required from families remain the same.

Rural poverty sits at around 41.5 percent, almost double the national average; 46 percent of rural homes were classified as structurally weak and unlikely to withstand destructive winds. *TC Winston* alone caused \$752 million in housing damage. These facts demanded decisive leadership, modernisation, a government that listens, understands and acts. Mr. Speaker, the shift to a one-sixth contribution on new housing structure under Scheme 2 was a strategic and compassionate reform aligned to evidence of rising costs, rural hardship and vulnerability.

The single decision improved housing affordability by 45 percent, increased access for low-income rural families, reduced project reprioritization due to relative unaffordability of the one-third contribution, and ensured the programme stays pro-poor. This is what strategic policy looks like through a targeted evidence-based and responsive approach to real-life conditions.

Under this programme, every new home now follows engineer-certified designs, the National Building Code, National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018-2030 and aligned to the Sendai Framework. This is a major shift where past homes were vulnerable, this Government builds for safety, survival and long-term resilience. The programme now doubles as a rural economic stimulus as well:

- (a) Timber and hardware are procured locally;
- (b) Community members are trained and certified;
- (c) Local contractors participate in construction; and
- (d) Value stays circulating in the rural economy.

This builds the very foundations of self-reliance, community enterprise and rural economic stability. The successful community-led Timber Housing Schemes in Lekanai in Gau, Naqalotu in Kadavu and Vunisea in Kadavu demonstrate the power of this partnership model with the Ministry of Forestry under Scheme 3 on the utilization of the resource owners' timber and native trees. The Ministry is also in the final stages of securing a partnership with the Fiji National Provident Fund regarding assistance to members on their one-sixth contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important for this House to clearly understand the difference between what the previous administration left behind and what this Government has delivered. Under the

previous administration, the programme stagnated. There was a half-hearted attempt to deliver the programme, which ended up with it being mothballed under the auspices of another ministry and ended up with no homes being constructed. The progress was minimal and created severe backlogs.

The Coalition Government inherited a dormant Rural Housing Assistance Programme from the previous government. It had to organise the reimbursement of numerous very frustrated and upset Rural Housing Assistance Scheme applicants who had already paid their one-third contribution. The programme was reinstated and modernised:

- (a) 310 homes have been delivered with 92 more underway;
- (b) Engineer certificate cyclone resilient designs now standard;
- (c) Contributions reduced to one-sixth;
- (d) Flexibility was introduced to accommodate genuine hardship;
- (e) Termite resistant concrete options were added; and
- (f) Other communal structures are now eligible for support and capacity building is embedded into the programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are not small changes. This is the difference between a government that neglected on its duty to its citizens and a Coalition Government that delivers real transformation for rural and maritime families.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Rural Housing Programme is a strategic pillar that contributes directly to rural poverty reduction under the National Development Plan 2025-2029. Integrated Rural Development under the National Rural Development Policy, which is currently in the consultation stages. Disaster preparedness under the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 for economic empowerment and inclusive growth, and long-term resilience and reduction of post-disaster government spending.

Rural housing, therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a strategic investment in rural transformation. The transformed Rural Housing Programme has restored dignity, strengthened resilience, empowered communities and placed families at the centre of development. It is now stronger, fairer, more accessible and makes communities more resilient than ever before. This Government remains committed to expanding its reach so that every Fijian family, no matter their location can enjoy the safety, security and dignity that a resilient home provides. We are laying the foundations for rural transformation, economic empowerment and a more resilient Fiji.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am reminded of what the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara once said about development in Fiji. The true measure of national development is seen in our rural areas. The people in our villages, our settlements and our other islands can feel progress in their daily lives and the country is moving forward. If they cannot, then we still have work to do.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a bit nauseating and

MR. SPEAKER.- My apologies, can I just go back to the original question posed by honourable Tuicolo and I will come back to you. My apologies honourable Usamate.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for his response. We understand that to be eligible under the Rural Housing Programme Assistance, the applicant must reside permanently in the village or rural settlement recognised by the provincial council or district advisory council. What happens if any applicant who is currently residing in any urban informal settlement has finally decided to return to the village? Can they too be considered under the RHP Assistance?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Yes, as long as they reside in the rural community, whether it is a village or rural settlement, then they are eligible for the programme.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is slightly amusing and a bit nauseating for the honourable Minister to, sort of insinuating that the former government did not do anything about it. You go to any village and you will see these houses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister talked about Vunisei Village in Kadavu, and I am glad that that has happened. Just up the road from Vunisei is the village of Mataso, where there was quite a lot of timber that was cut. They did build some houses. Are there any plans where this timber has been cut, for them to progress, like in the village of Mataso, to start building homes? I am not asking people the cheering squad on that side; the *lave liga* squad on this side, hold your peace. Honourable Minister, are there any plans for that?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will have to get back to my officials on that. I believe that might have been a programme that had started from their time. I will have to get the details from my officials.

Written Questions

Primary and Secondary School Heads on Acting Positions (Question No. 263/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the number of Primary and Secondary School Heads who are on acting positions and for how long?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I submit my response according to the Standing Order.

Statistics on Ice Plants in Rural and Maritime Regions (Question No. 264/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry update Parliament on the following –

- (a) how many ice plants are stationed in the rural and maritime regions, per Division; and
- (b) are there plans to install more ice plants and in which areas or location?

¹ HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister will submit her response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 263/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

Statistics on Terminated/Demoted Police Officers
(Question No. 265/2025)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament on the number of Police Officers, from 1st January 2023 to 30th October 2025, who have been –

- (a) terminated from employment; and
- (b) demoted in rank?

² HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to table my response.

BILLS – FIRST READING

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 84, I move:

That the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Bill 2025 (Bill No. 37/2025), be now read for the first time.

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

(Copies of the Bill were handed to Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- As we are almost close to 12.30 p.m., our normal time for break, we are almost towards the end of our Order Paper for today, unless I hear any violent objections, we will continue to the end of the Order.

[A Bill for an Act to provide for the recognition, protection and promotion of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to give effect to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and for related matters (Bill No. 37 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.

In that respect, I would encourage all the honourable 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.

**REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON
MARITIME SEARCH AND RESCUE 1979**

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue 1979.

² Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 265/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure II.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the honourable Acting Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I can confirm that the honourable Acting Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and Written Analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2). Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Treaty and Analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament not later than 30 days from today.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting. Thank you for your participation. The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.33 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 263/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 2381)



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

Reply to Question No. 263/2025 is as follows:

The Ministry of Education acknowledges that a substantial number of school leadership positions are being held in an acting capacity. As of 31st October, 2025, there is a total of 112HOS currently acting.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 265/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications (Ref. Page 2381-2382)



MINISTER FOR POLICING AND COMMUNICATIONS
(Hon. I. Naivalurua)

Reply to Question No. 265/2025 is as follows:

The termination and demotion of officers in the FPF are governed primarily by the Police Act 1965, related regulations (such as the Police Regulations 1965), and the general disciplinary powers granted to the Commissioner of Police under the 2013 Constitution of Fiji specifically under Section 129(7). These actions are fundamentally disciplinary measures taken against officers for breaches of discipline or other serious issues affecting their suitability for service.

The authority to impose penalties, including demotion and termination (dismissal), rests primarily with the Commissioner of Police.

Disciplinary action, including the most severe penalties of demotion or dismissal, is instituted for a range of reasons, generally categorised as:

- Disciplinary Offences (misconduct)
- Breaches of discipline prescribed in regulations and are often classified based on severity. These offences typically include:
 - Neglect of duty
 - Insubordination or disobedience to orders
 - Corrupt practices (e.g. bribery, abuse of office)
 - Conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline of FPF
 - Breaches of internal policies
 - Conviction by any court for a criminal offence; and
 - Discharge for inefficiency/unsuitability (non-disciplinary grounds).

The Commissioner also has the authority to discharge (terminate) a police officer for non-disciplinary reasons, such as:

- Medical unfitness: If the officer is pronounced by a government medical officer to be mentally or physically unfit for further service
- Loss of efficiency: If the Commissioner considers the officer unlikely to become or has ceased to be an efficient police officer
- Public Interest: If the Commissioner considers it desirable in the public interest that the officer should be discharged.

Any disciplinary action resulting in demotion or termination follows a fair and transparent process as per the Police Act & Subsidiary Legislation and the FPF's Disciplinary Policy, which involves investigation, formal charge, right of reply, decision and penalty, judicial review.

From 1 January, 2023 to 30 October, 2025, the FPF terminated the services of 78 officers, most of whom did not follow proper systems and processes of resignation and overseas travel.

From 2023-August 2025, about 80 percent of the police officers who were terminated deserted the FPF and resigned once they were overseas.

Majority generally dismissed themselves for not adhering to the proper systems and processes of resignation in the FPF.

Most of the police officers left for employment in the New Zealand Corrections Services during this period.

Table 1: FPF Termination & Demotion (1 January 2023-30October)

Year/Month	Termination	Discharged on Medical Grounds	Total
2023-2024	30	4	34
2024-August 2025	33	2	35
August 2025	4	0	4
September 2025	2	0	2
October 2025	3	0	3
Total	72	6	78

Demotion in Rank

There was no demotion in rank during the period in review.