

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.39 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry; the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; honourable P.D. Kumar; and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 26th November, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- 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. I also welcome all those joining us in the public gallery, and those tuned in via television or online. Thank you for staying connected and engaged in our parliamentary proceedings.

Visitors in Public Gallery

Honourable Members, please join me this morning in warmly welcoming the students, teachers and parents of Nakurukuruvakatini Primary School in Naitasiri.

On behalf of the honourable Members, I warmly welcome you all to Parliament. I hope that this visit will expand your understanding of how your Parliament works and provide significant awareness on the vital role Parliament plays in determining and safeguarding your democracy.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Urgent Oral Question from Hon. V. Pillay

Honourable Members, an urgent oral question from honourable Viam Pillay was received before 8.30 a.m. I will now deliver my ruling with respect to the urgent oral question.

Honourable Members, I wish to reiterate and clarify that Standing Order 43(1) provides that a written copy of the question must be delivered to the Secretary-General one hour before the sitting

in which the question will be asked.

I can confirm that this requirement was duly met, and secondly, the question must be of an urgent character and relates to a matter of public importance in which the Speaker must decide upon whether the question satisfies those requirements of urgency and public importance. I have taken the time to closely look at the urgent oral question, and rule that whilst it is a matter of public importance, it is not of an urgent character.

The urgent oral question does not need the threshold requirement of urgency at this time. The process concerning the issue is still taking its proper cause and the Special Committee on Sugar has already been granted approval by Parliament to respond back to the House at a later sitting.

As I have said accordingly, the question does not meet the threshold requirement of urgency, and that the House shall await the Special Committee's Report in due course. It is therefore the Chair's ruling that the honourable Viam Pillay's question is disallowed.

I reiterate once more; the oral question must fully satisfy the requirements provided for under Standing Order 43(1).

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee 2022 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Review Report on the 2022 Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC) Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FASANOC, with its affiliation with International Olympic Committee (IOC), Commonwealth Games Federation and Pacific Games Committee, has played a pivotal role in sending Team Fiji to international and regional games. Since its inception in 1938, Team Fiji have been participating in Commonwealth Games, Olympic Games and Pacific Games and hosted regional games.

The 38 affiliated national sporting federations have attained international exposure and regularly participated in international games with three-way funding from the Government of Fiji, National Sporting Federation and International partners.

Sir, FASANOC promotes an institutional sustainability by working within a broader national framework that aligns to various sporting goals. The Committee acknowledged FASANOC's intentions to actively bid to host regional games and further recommends that Government of Fiji must support and lobby for international and regional events to be hosted in Fiji.

I sincerely thank Ms. Vanessa Kilner, the Chief Executive Officer, and the Executive Board of FASANOC, for their valuable contributions to this review process.

I am thankful to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs Members - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Parveen Bala, for their invaluable contribution and support. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Labasa Town Council 2018 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Review Report on the Labasa Town Council 2018 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee considers issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

The Committee's deliberations highlighted several critical issues that require urgent attention to ensure sustainable urban growth and improved service delivery for the people of Labasa.

The Committee acknowledged the work carried out by the Labasa Town Council and recommends that it continues to promote community engagement by achieving a healthy environment and efficient infrastructure development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the significant revenue loss resulting from the repeal of the Business Licensing Act in 2020 during COVID, hence the Committee recommends that Government restores this revenue stream to safeguard the financial sustainability of the Municipal Council.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted that despite having \$2 million in rate arrears, the Labasa Town Council has collected 80 percent of its current rate. The Committee further recommends that Labasa Town Council must take legal action against default ratepayers.

The Committee also observed the delays by Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) in responding to the Council's requests for road markings, underground culvert maintenance, road signage, and related infrastructure maintenance. These delays have caused inconvenience to ratepayers and hindered municipal efficiency. Therefore, the Committee recommends the establishment of a structured coordination mechanism between FRA and the Labasa Town Council, to ensure timely service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted that the Audited Financial Report for the year 2018 was not included in the Council's Annual Report. Upon inquiry, it was revealed that the Audited Financial Report was still with the Ministry of Local Government, and this was an oversight by the Ministry.

The Labasa Town Council, together with the Ministry of Local Government, must adhere to section 45(1) of the Financial Management Act 2024 which states that the Minister must table in Parliament a whole of government annual report for each financial year.

I take this opportunity to thank the Special Administrator, Acting Chief Executive Officer and the management of Labasa Town Council for their timely assistance in this review process.

I also thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay and honourable Parveen Bala, for their invaluable input and support. I extend my sincere appreciation to honourable Jone Usamate for his contribution and support as an Alternate Member.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Tavua Town Council 2019 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Review Report on the Tavua Town Council 2019 Annual Report.

The Standing Committee, in its review of the Annual Report, identified critical issues affecting municipal governance and service delivery. These included:

- (1) delays in infrastructure and maintenance;
- (2) lack of a sewerage system;
- (3) challenges in relocating the Municipal Market, bus station, taxi and carrier stand; as well as
- (4) financial constraints following the repeal of the Business Licensing Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee also noted gaps in performance reporting and the need for environmental compliance for the proposed landfill site at Koro No. 1.

To address those concerns, the Committee recommends urgent collaboration between the Tavua Town Council, the relevant Ministries and agencies, to expedite the Environmental Impact Assessment process, improve coordination with Fiji Roads Authority and prioritise the sewerage reticulation project.

Furthermore, the Committee calls for strengthened performance reporting and decisive action on the market, and the bus, taxi and carrier stand relocation and measures to restore revenue streams lost due to legislative changes. These recommendations aims to enhance municipal services, promote

sustainable development and improve the quality of life for the people of Tavua.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I thank the Chief Executive Officer for the Tavua Town Council and Officials for their services and contributions to this review process.

I thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Alikia Bia, honourable Viam Pillay and honourable Parveen Bala, for their invaluable input and support. I extend my appreciation to honourable Jone Usamate for his contribution and support as an Alternate Member.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Crown Land Lease System Audit Report – Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report presents the findings of the Information Technology Audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) on the Crown Land Lease System (CLLS), under the responsibility of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources. The audit was undertaken at the request of the Ministry to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of CLLS in managing Crown and State leases, including lease status and rental records.

The CLLS, managed by the IT Unit within the Geospatial Information Management Unit of the Ministry, has served as the central system for recording lease details since its inception in the 1960s. Originally implemented as a Disc Operating System (DOS), it was upgraded to an Oracle-based system in 2007, which remains in use until today.

The audit reviewed system records from 1st January, 2020 to 28th October, 2023. It was conducted with the IT Audit Manual for Supreme Audit Institutions, aligned to the Control Objective on Information Technology Framework. The audit focused on five critical IT domains:

- (1) IT governance;
- (2) IT Operations;
- (3) Information Security;
- (4) Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery; and
- (5) Application Control.

Each domain was evaluated to determine how effectively the CLLS supports the Ministry's mandate and whether it meets contemporary standards of reliability, security, and operational performance.

The audit concluded that the CLLS is obsolete, rendering it ineffective and inefficient in maintaining accurate records. This has led to:

- incorrect calculations of lease interest on arrears, impacting financial accuracy;
- significant weaknesses in the governance framework, impacting compliance and internal controls;
- data integrity issues, affecting input, processing, and reliability; and
- operational inefficiencies, hindering timely and accurate decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the system's outdated infrastructure and limited functionality have become a liability, compromising the Ministry's ability to manage land leases with precision and accountability.

The implications of these findings are significant. Inaccurate lease records not only affect revenue collection but also undermine public confidence in the Ministry's stewardship of Crown and State land assets. There is an urgent need to review and upgrade the entire system. A modern, secure and efficient platform will ensure accurate and timely data entry, reliable processing and reporting, secure data storage and retrieval, and compliance with IT best practices and security.

To address these challenges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the following actions are recommended:

- (a) Initiation of a full system overhaul, replacing the outdated Oracle-based platform with a modern integrated solution.
- (b) Engage in cross-functional stakeholder consultations to ensure the new system meets operational and strategic needs.
- (c) Implement robust training and change management programmes to support staff during transition.
- (d) Establish ongoing monitoring and audit mechanisms to maintain system integrity and performance.

I would also like, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture to acknowledge the significant contributions by the previous Chairman, whom I have replaced and is the current Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, together with the Members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I would like to place on record my appreciation on how they have managed to start catching up on all the outstanding reports that were neglected from the other side.

In conclusion, this Report highlights critical deficiencies in the Crown land lease system but also represents a clear opportunity for transformation. By acting decisively, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry can build a system that reflects its commitment to excellence, supports national development, and delivers reliable service to the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to acknowledge my fellow Members of the Standing Committee. Let us move forward with purpose, collaboration and a shared vision. In that respect, I have the honour of presenting this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Forestry Bill 2025

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to table the Review Report on the Forestry Bill 2025 (Bill No. 36 of 2025). The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Forestry Bill 2025 to scrutinise and to return a report on its findings to Parliament.

At the outset, Sir, the Committee noted that the Forestry Bill 2025 is a result of the review of the Forest Act 1992, which was endorsed by Government. The Forestry Bill 2025 and the Forest Act 1992 represent two distinctive legislative frameworks for forest management in Fiji. While the Forest Act 1992 provided foundational regulations for forest conservation and utilisation, the Forestry Bill 2025 introduces a more comprehensive legislation and alignment with international standards. The Bill, Sir, has a broader governance and environmental management approach compared to the Act, and aligns with other new laws, policies, the current National Development Plan and international agreements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight some of the key differences of the two legislations. In terms of the Objectives and Principles, the Act focusses on the management and utilisation of forest resources, with limited emphasis on sustainability and environmental conservation. The Bill, Sir, introduces comprehensive objectives, emphasizing sustainable forest management, conservation of biodiversity, climate change mitigation, equitable benefit sharing and community participation. It incorporates principles such as inclusive participation, transparent accountability, legal certainty and effective governance.

In terms of Governance and Structure, the Act establishes a Forestry Board to advise the Minister on forestry policy. The Conservator of Forests is responsible for enforcement and advising the Minister. The Bill, Sir, expands governance with the creation of the Forestry Advisory Council, Forest Practices Tribunal, Forestry Committees and Licensing Committees. The Conservator of Forests has broader responsibilities, including policy development, enforcement and international collaboration.

In Licensing and Certification, the Act focuses on issuing licences for timber extraction and other forest activities, with limited provisions for sustainable practices. The Bill, however, introduces certified forest practices plans and various licences, for example, forest management licences, non-timber forest products licences, import/export licences and wood processing licences. Mr. Speaker, it emphasises compliance with Sustainable Forest Management Standards and includes provisions for compliance reports and annual assessments.

In terms of the Code of Forest Practices, the Act does not include a formal code of forest practices. However, the Bill mandates the development, issuance and regular assessment of a Code of Forest Practices, to ensure environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and sustainable

forest management.

In terms of Sustainable Forest Management, the Act is limited and focusses only on sustainability and ecosystem services. However, the Bill emphasizes sustainable forest management, protection of endangered species, forest health, and forest fire prevention. It includes provisions for forest restoration, reforestation, and afforestation.

In terms of Financial Mechanisms, the Act includes basic provisions for fees and royalties but lacks detailed financial mechanisms. The Bill, however, introduces advanced financial instruments such as payments for ecosystem services, carbon credits and public-private partnerships to support forest conservation and sustainable management.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of Enforcement and Penalties, the Act provides basic enforcement mechanisms including powers of inspection, arrest and seizure. The Bill expands enforcement measures including fixed penalty notices, alternative prosecution mechanisms and the establishment of a Forest Practices Tribunal for appeals and dispute resolution.

In terms of Climate Change and Emissions Reduction, the Act does not address climate change or emissions reduction. The Bill, however, aligns forest management with the Climate Change Act 2021, including provisions for emissions reduction projects, carbon sequestration and compliance with international climate agreements, like the Paris Agreement.

In terms of Customary Rights, the Act recognises *iTaukei* customary rights to hunt, fish and collect forest produce for subsistence use, with some restrictions. The Bill, however, maintains recognition of *iTaukei* customary rights but includes more detailed provisions to ensure alignment with sustainable forest management and international conventions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was noted that ever since the Forest Ordinance, customary rights had remained, ensuring that every landowner retained the right to use their own resources. Landowners will be able to receive both, monetary and non-monetary benefits, when their forest resources are protected rather than harvested.

However, they are permitted to use timber from their land for personal purposes, but they cannot move it outside its forest boundary without authorisation. For example, if a timber was harvested in Lautoka and intended for building a house in Suva, a permit is required. So, the legislation is applied whenever a landowner wishes to operate commercially for the purpose of protecting and sustaining our forests.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Forest Classification and Monitoring, the Act provides basic provisions for forest reserves and nature reserves. The Bill sets out clear types of forests (like forests for different uses, protected forests, and forests with high conservation value) and requires a national check of forest resources every 10 years, using modern tools such as satellite images. Those were some of the findings the Committee noted during its review of the Forestry Bill.

As part of the review, the Committee also conducted consultation in targeted areas to gather opinions and feedback from the public. The Committee received support on the introduction of the Bill, from majority of the public who had participated in the public consultation. However, like most activities that impact the lives of the people, there were suggestions that are based on the premise of making improvements to the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the issues the Committee noted during the public consultation was on Offences and Fines, and whether improvement notices would be issued before penalties were

imposed. In this case, the offence depends on the type of licence requested, and in the case of logging, improvement notices will always be given first, with monitoring officers notifying parties of non-compliance before any fines are applied. The new Bill also introduces a Tribunal Committee designed to be user-friendly.

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee resolved that the current draft of the Bill is generally sufficient, requiring only minor amendments to complement and strengthen the much-needed legislation. This position reflects the Committee's view that the Bill, in its present form, provides an adequate framework, while acknowledging that small refinements will enhance its effectiveness and ensure it fully addresses the intended objectives.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their deliberations and input.

Sir, I, on behalf of the Committee, commend the Forestry Bill 2025 (Bill No. 36 of 2025) to Parliament and seek the support of all Members of this august House for the Bill.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Friday, 7th November, 2025, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report accordingly, and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Monday, 1st December, 2025.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Civil Service and Public Enterprises; and
- (2) Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development.

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

State Visit to Japan - Strengthening Fiji's Global Partnership

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; *ni sa bula vina'a* and a very good morning to you all. I extend our greetings to those who are joining us via livestream or through other media platforms. I add my words of welcome to our young friends who were here earlier. I hope they are enjoying their visit to Suva. I am sure they have seen bright lights before, where they have come from.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just completed a visit to Japan and today, I rise to update this august House on that visit earlier this month, and to report on the continuing work that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade has been doing in strengthening Fiji's global partnership and our connection with Fijians living abroad.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Government of Japan for their kind invitation, and for the remarkable contributions that they have provided to Fiji over the years since

we established our relationship 55 years ago. Both countries share a longstanding friendship, built on mutual respect, shared democratic values and cooperation. We are also important partners in maintaining the rules-based international order, based on the primacy of the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji-Japan relations have resulted in cooperation that has progressed across a wide range of areas, including infrastructure, education, health and medical care, disaster prevention, security, justice, sports exchanges and, most recently, human mobility. It has been my intention to further deepen our ties with Japan, and I was honoured to accept the gracious invitation that was extended to us by Japan to make this official visit from the 12th to 15th of this month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the role played by the outgoing Japanese Ambassador, who hosted his last reception last night to say, 'thank you' and 'goodbye' to his friends in Fiji before he takes up his next appointment in cold Europe. He is, sort of, not really anticipating that, and he has promised that he will buy enough Fiji rum on his way out.

I had a summit with the Prime Minister of Japan, that happened on 13th November. I had the distinct honour of meeting the newly elected and first lady Prime Minister of Japan, Her Excellency Sanae Takaichi. The meeting proved to be highly beneficial as both parties participated in thorough discussions aimed at fostering bilateral cooperation. Among the key topics discussed were the disaster risk resilience programme, enhancing economic relations, and the importance of maritime security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to emphasise that bilateral cooperation greatly assists in the preservation of national and regional peace and stability. I, therefore, wish to acknowledge the profound contribution of the Government of Japan and, in this respect, by designating Fiji as its inaugural recipient of Official Security Assistance.

The honourable Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi expressed her deep appreciation to Fiji for the trust in Japan's efforts regarding the discharge of Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) treated water into the sea. Prime Minister Takaichi reassured that Japan's activities and actions will continue to be transparent and accountable, based on scientific evidence to enhance confidence in safety.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this bilateral meeting provided an opportunity for both countries to address pertinent regional issues. Japan expressed its strong support for regional unity and the Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy, which exemplifies that commitment. Additionally, Japan reaffirms its dedication to fulfilling the commitments made at the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10), which was held last year and includes a financial contribution of US\$3 million to the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF). Furthermore, Japan reaffirmed its support in preparation for PALM11, scheduled to take place in 2027. They graciously acknowledged that I was the only leader at PALM10 who was there at PALM1 in 1994.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising that climate change is an existential threat in the Pacific, Japan acknowledges the importance of having Pacific Island Countries represented in platforms, like the Conference of the Parties (COP) on Climate Change.

The bilateral meeting culminated in the signing of the *Lomavata Kizuna Partnership* – a joint Communique that reaffirmed the bilateral relations of Fiji and Japan. The Communique aims to further enhance cooperation across security, economic development, climate resilience, and cultural exchange.

Meeting with the Japan Minister of Defence: I had the privilege of participating in discussions with Japan's Minister of Defence, His Excellency Shinjiro Koizumi, on 12th November at the Ministry of Defence headquarters. Our conversations were centred on enhancing maritime resilience and exploring avenues for humanitarian assistance. Minister Koizumi emphasised that Fiji is an important partner for Japan, as both nations share core values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. He also highlighted Fiji's important role as one of the few countries in the Pacific region that maintains its own military.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, discussions focused on strategies to combat transnational organised crimes that have severely impacted our security resources in the maritime space. Minister Koizumi presented information on the assistance that Japan can provide through its decommissioned naval vessels, which could significantly enhance our capacity to monitor activities that pose a threat to Fiji's maritime domain. Fiji showed its appreciation to Japan's ongoing support towards enhancing maritime resilience and humanitarian assistance across the Pacific, contributions in human resource development, and technical cooperation through its development agency, JICA.

Fiji also notes Japan's support in the Pacific maritime and vocational sectors. Fiji remains committed to this collaboration through its recently opened Maritime Essential Services Centre in Lami.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I highlighted that the support and partnership directly contributed to the implementation of the Ocean of Peace Declaration, in tandem with other Pacific Island Forum's initiatives of the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which reinforces the Pacific's collective commitment to peace, security and development.

Minister Koizumi paid tribute to Fiji's leadership in the Pacific and pledged Japan's commitment to continuing defence cooperation between the two countries. He reflected that a week prior to our meeting, Fiji Navy participated in the first ever joint exercise with the Japanese Navy, and he looks forward to the second Japan-Pacific Defence Dialogue in February next year.

Meeting with the Japanese Minister of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport and Tourism: I have been asked why I did not ask the Deputy Prime Minister to act while I was away. I was hoping that certain discussions in Japan would necessitate him leaving his post and coming to join me in some negotiations, particularly in civil aviation. My last bilateral meeting was with the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, His Excellency Yasushi Kaneko. Discussions in this meeting included the mega port construction and reviving the shipbuilding industry in Fiji.

The bilateral discussions also focused on strengthening capacity building initiatives and enhancing support for Fiji's maritime security capabilities through collaborations with partners such as the Japan Coast Guard. These engagements aim to improve our capabilities in search and rescue operations and advance other critical maritime security priorities.

Memorandum of Cooperation on the Technical Intern Training Programme: This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a subject that was going to be asked as a question later on, and I did not plan that this Ministerial Statement would cut across that question. This visit also provided the Government of Fiji with a valuable opportunity to advance cooperation in human resource development and strengthen capacity building initiatives.

At the margins of the visit, the Permanent Secretary for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations, Mr. Jone Maritino Nemani, and the Commissioner of the Immigration Services Agency of Japan, Mr. Hideharu Maruyama, executed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) on the Technical Intern Training Programme. The MOC aims to transfer advanced technical skills and

knowledge from Japan to Fiji, creating structured pathways for Fijian workers to gain practical experience at international standards. In so doing, they are ingrained into the deep Japanese traditional culture at the workplace in what is globally recognised as the Japanese work ethic. This is a lesson that can inform Fijian efforts in incorporating their values into our own work culture.

The MOC initiative addresses critical labour market needs for both countries, while deepening bilateral ties through cultural and people-to-people exchanges, fostering mutual economic resilience and partnerships. The MOC establishes a structured framework that integrates labour mobility with capacity building, reflecting a commitment to workforce development by both governments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, MOC addresses Fiji's challenges, both as brain-drain and underemployment, while providing Japan with a mechanism to meet labour shortages, creating a mutually beneficial partnership that reinforces economic resilience while deepening bilateral ties. The MOC stands as a strategic framework that aligns Fiji's workforce aspirations with Japan's economic imperatives. It sets the stage for sustainable human resource development and shared prosperity.

I also had the opportunity to interact with our diaspora in Japan. It was a very easy evening. Unfortunately, my grandson was not there. He was on a rugby training camp in another area, quite a distance from Tokyo. It is encouraging to see our people progressing and making significant contributions outside of Fiji. Their commitment to their families and homeland continues to play an important role in supporting our economy and promoting the nation's values abroad.

I, once again, take this opportunity to commend the Fijian diaspora, not only in Japan, but all over the world, for their valuable contributions to Fiji's development through their remittances, skills acquired, their broad community initiatives - a lot of them help directly with their village programmes and being outstanding ambassadors of this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also had bilateral meetings with our Japanese counterparts who facilitated site visits to key institutions. These included the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization (NARO) and I would like to encourage the honourable Minister for Agriculture to encourage our own Research Station in Koronivia to link up with NARO of Japan; I also visited the Yokohama Port; the Keihin Koyasu Shipyard; and Narita Airport. Those visits provided valuable insights and lessons that hold significant relevance for the context of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visit to NARO was a real eye-opener. It started with a tour of the facility. Sir, NARO serves as Japan's largest leading research institution dedicated to agricultural and food sciences with 3,300 employees and 1,700 researchers. Operating under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, it conducts cutting-edge research in areas such as crop improvement, livestock development, soil health and climate-resilient farming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through its work, NARO helps enhance productivity and efficiency in Japan's agricultural sector, which is critical for a country with limited arable land and ageing farming population. Beyond productivity, NARO is instrumental in safeguarding Japan's food supply and environmental sustainability. It develops technologies to reduce pesticide use, improve water management and adapt crops to changing climate conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji can learn a lot to enhance its agriculture sector by adopting relevant strategies from Japan through NARO. These would include strengthening farmer cooperatives for shared resources and market access, investing in climate-resilient technologies through drought-tolerant crops, precision irrigation and strengthening the agricultural research hub to drive

innovation, such as the one we have in Koronivia. These approaches, if adopted in a suitable scale, can help Fiji improve productivity, adapt to climate challenges and build a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural economy. This would greatly contribute to food security and sustainable farming techniques in the region.

On Yokohama Port, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the operators there, was established in 1874, the year Fiji was ceded to Great Britain. They were already running big ports. It accommodates numerous cruise and cargo ships, making it a gateway for both, commercial and passenger traffic. It boasts over 90 regular international container shipping routes, connecting Japan to global markets.

¹ Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a little more, but I would like to table my Statement in written form, for those who are coming after us and those who may want to read for their own benefit.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister for his Ministerial Statement this morning on strengthening Fiji's global partnership, particularly in relation to his recent visit to Japan. I also join the honourable Prime Minister in acknowledging the Government of Japan for our longstanding friendship and relationship, and for their remarkable contribution to Fiji over the years. Unfortunately, I cannot cover a lot as well within the limited time that I have but, of course, such visits are important.

We live in very challenging times. We have our own issues. There are regional issues, and there are global issues that are shaped by global powers and, of course, the extraordinary events that are happening as well. It is important that we are nimble and flexible enough to seize the opportunities that are presented before us, particularly when it comes to our strategic partners and our bilateral partners. I also acknowledge the outgoing Japanese Ambassador, and we wish him well too in his next posting.

Honourable Prime Minister, you have covered a lot in the few days that you were in Japan. In your last Ministerial Statement when you last visited Japan, there were two issues. One major issue that I raised was on the Nadi River Flooding Mitigation Programme because Japan was heavily involved from the beginning with the technical work. I know that this is progressing. I know that our partner – the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the honourable Minister for Finance is probably aware, is now in the picture, but the initial technical work was done by the Japanese Government through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and we continue to acknowledge them for that. I am thankful that you mentioned the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) contribution by Japan. This is very much an area that we need a lot of assistance on, given the challenges that we have in terms of our infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, there are a lot that have been covered by the honourable Prime Minister. I thank you, honourable Prime Minister, for raising the issue about your visit to the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization (NARO). I would like to link this to a UNDP Report, if I remember correctly - it was in 2014 on human security challenges, particularly in the Pacific region. Top amongst the list is economic security and the next one is food security and health, and then the list goes on. It is now called the “seven plus”, because they have added technology security as well into that list.

The food security aspect is very important. If I may link that to the recent COP30, I am quite disappointed that agriculture was not represented, particularly the technical staff. We were the initiators of the Koronivia Work Programme under the UNFCCC process. I had shared this with the

¹ Editor's Note: Written Transcript of Ministerial Statement tabled by the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Civil Service, Public Enterprises and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics is appended as **Schedule 1.**

honourable Minister for Lands and Minerals and is probably something that I will raise with the honourable Minister later on, that we need to look at specific technical areas and things that need to represent us in these global forums.

The Director of Fiji Meteorological Service was not there as well, honourable Prime Minister. He is the scientific focal point in Fiji related to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) because IPCC is run by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), made up of scientists and for Fiji, our Director of Fiji Meteorological Service is the focal point for science in the UNFCCC process.

If I may add to that, honourable Prime Minister, in my recent observation at COP30, we also need serious diplomatic efforts to assist the Minister in pursuing the issues. Last year, I recalled, when the briefing was done to the Pacific Island Countries and to Fiji as well, our negotiators were saying, “Oh, the developed countries are blocking this, blocking that”, but we have friends within the developed countries. Japan is a key partner, the European Union is a key partner, France takes ownership of the Paris Agreement, and Germany is a key partner. So, those are the issues that we can also take advantage of when we are pursuing our diplomatic relations, apart from the others that you have highlighted, honourable Prime Minister.

I also wish to acknowledge the Fijian diaspora in Japan and, of course, all over the world. Thank you, once again, for that Ministerial Statement, honourable Prime Minister.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we take a break, I would just like to make a comment. For those of us who have had the privilege of serving in the diplomatic service or are familiar with the practice or the convention of diplomacy, we are very aware of the practice, that is, the meetings of newly elected heads of governments or heads of States of a country with other countries' heads of governments which are normally reserved for the privileged and the favoured partners of that country in its international relations. We are aware of the privilege that the Prime Minister of Japan had granted to you, Sir, and in turn to our country, Fiji.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend the proceedings for a break and Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.41 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.20 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed with other matters, I invite you to, please, join me in warmly welcoming the students, teachers, and parents of Bayly Memorial School in Ra. I am given to understand that this is honourable Ratu Josaia Niudamu's primary school.

You are most welcome to your Parliament, and I hope that this visit will provide you with some insights into how the Parliament works, and also your understanding of the role of Parliament in the democracy we have. Welcome once more.

Building a Resilient and Inclusive MSME Sector for Fiji's Future

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers and all honourable Members of Parliament, *vei kemudou na gonevuli, qasenivuli, i tubutubu mai na Bayly Memorial School, Rakiraki - ara na yadra.*

I rise today to provide an update on the Government's transformative initiatives supporting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which is the backbone of Fiji's economy and the catalyst for inclusive economic growth. I wish to acknowledge the former Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Kamikamica, for the transformative work done so far.

I do so in light of the increasing demand for business support, the strong performance of our MSME programmes this year and the need to update Parliament on the outcomes of the MSME Conference and the reforms underpinning our next phase of growth. This is to amplify MSME issues raised as questions in this august House because I saw that there were three questions in Parliament, which means that there is a need for the public to be well-informed of MSMEs.

My Statement will cover four areas: our financial and regulatory reforms, programme results, lessons from the MSME Conference and how we are positioning MSMEs for Fiji's economic future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the first imperative is that MSMEs is a growth engine for Fiji. They are not merely small businesses, but they are Fiji's growth engine. They contribute 18 percent to our GDP, employ 60 percent of our workforce and represent more than 80 percent of all registered businesses. They are part of the key to unlock our growth pathway to achieve 5 percent to 7 percent targeted growth in years to come.

They keep our markets vibrant, communities thriving and food on our tables. The Government's unwavering commitment is to unlock the full potential of these enterprises and create pathways for every Fijian to contribute to and benefit from the nation's prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order for us to do this, we are providing financial incentives to empower enterprise creation. In this financial year, the Government has taken bold steps to expand its spectrum of financial incentive, directly encouraging enterprise creation and risk taking, particularly among youth and women. We have introduced a 150 percent tax deduction for businesses that donate to accredited start-up support programmes, such as incubators, accelerators and entrepreneurship development programmes. This new initiative for incentive encourages greater private sector and philanthropic investment in the MSME ecosystem and support the growth of scalable businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a record financial commitment in this financial year. The commitment of the Government to MSMEs is tangible and unprecedented. This year alone, MSME support has been allocated nearly \$160 million, an increase of 33 percent from the last financial year,

disbursed across multiple Ministries. This is our largest allocation to-date and represents an investment in resilience, an affirmation that MSMEs are vital for absorbing shocks, fostering innovation, and driving inclusive growth across urban and rural Fiji. Our vision is for MSMEs to contribute, at least, 40 percent of our GDP by 2030, that is, from the current 18 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also expanding grant programmes to turn ideas into thriving enterprises. Our expanded grant programmes ensure that good ideas do not stall for lack of support and that young people see entrepreneurship as a viable and celebrated path.

We have the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) which has been revitalised and expanded and offers grants of up to \$50,000 for youth-led ventures with breakthrough potential. In the last three years, Government support has enabled 12 MSMEs to access around \$313,000 in YES funding, turning innovative ideas into viable enterprises.

We also have the Graduate Business Start-up Capital, piloted last year with proven success, and has seen its allocation increase in this new financial year, allowing the facilitators - Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service (TELS) and Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF) to assist 30 new graduates while still providing support to the piloted cohort of 21 entrepreneurs, who have gone on to open their businesses. Every successful applicant receives \$5,000 in start-up capital, coupled with structured support in business planning, financial management and marketing.

Most recently, FCEF and TELS have signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of New South Wales to provide support in research and product development. We are also driving regulatory reform through the Ease of Doing Business, which I said yesterday.

We also have a robust monitoring and accountability framework put into place. Strong governance is essential to ensuring MSME support, translating into sustainable outcomes. In the 2024-2025 financial year, the Ministry monitored 5,053 MSME projects, an increase of 46 percent compared to the previous year. Our officers employ Kobo Toolbox technology for real-time, field-based data collection.

In the last three years, the Ministry has invested in over 2,000 MSME recipients to the tune of \$8 million. The results are compelling - 2,175 jobs have been generated, sustaining livelihoods for over 8,700 Fijians with 36 percent of these positions held by women, reflecting our commitment to inclusive growth.

Programme success rates have been exceptional. The Integrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP) achieved 89 percent, Northern Development Programme (NDP) - 91 percent and the Trade Enhancement Programme (TEP) - 81 percent. On average, IHRDP recipients create four jobs, while the National Export Strategy (NES) creates 28 jobs per recipient with the NES-supported enterprises average around \$10 million in annual sales turnover.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are stories of transformation, and we are celebrating a real impact. These statistics represent real livelihoods being transformed, for example:

- Mr. Inoke Cakitaki of Nadamole Village received a 23-foot fiberglass boat and a 40-HP engine through NDP. His fishing enterprise now generates \$350 to \$500 weekly while creating two-family jobs.
- Mrs. Makereta Raisole of Rakiraki, supported by TEP, operates a successful food stall, earning \$850 to \$1,500 weekly, becoming a role model for other women entrepreneurs.

- The Vadravadra Co-operative on Gau Island achieved a robust sales growth from \$10,690 to over \$11,000 monthly between February 2024 and February 2025. Thanks to the support from the IHRDP Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have strengthened support pathways as well, and this is in response to monitoring and evaluation findings. We have implemented key measures:

- Business training for recipients, focusing on financial literacy and skills, required to run a business such as marketing, risk management, et cetera.
- Targeted support for red-flagged projects through follow-up visits, mentoring, and more frequent communication on advisory to overcome stumbling blocks.
- Stronger linkages with Business Assistance Fiji for one-on-one advisory services and access to subsidised financial services. Business Assistance Fiji is one entity that has not been well utilised. I encourage those with vision, dream, *tatadra* or *navunavu* that if they do not know where to start or go to, try Business Assistance Fiji.
- Enhanced focus on village-based and maritime region projects.
- Development of Fiji's first National MSME database and this is in partnership with UNDP to ensure real-time tracking, accountability and policy responsiveness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second part of my statement is on the Business Assistance Fiji MSME Conference 2025. The Conference themed, “Sustainable Tides: Connecting MSMEs for a Circular Economy” was held from 26th to 27th June, to coincide with the United Nations MSME Day. Organised by Business Assistance Fiji, the event brought over 300 entrepreneurs and stakeholders to discuss the growing shift towards sustainable production and consumption. Many MSMEs in Fiji are already integrating circular practices such as recycling, upcycling, organic farming, food waste reduction, repair services, and the development of renewable products.

“Sustainable Tides” symbolises the evolving role of MSMEs in Fiji as they lead the transition towards a circular economy. Like the ocean’s tide, this movement represents resilience, renewal and continuity, inspiring businesses to adopt regenerative models that reduce waste, improve resource efficiency and align economic growth with environmental stewardship.

The Conference revealed critical insights to shape future Government and development partners’ support, provided the opportunity to meet and develop potential collaborations with key players in the MSME ecosystem. I am told that participants called for policy reforms, allowing simpler licensing and better access to information, improved access to finance and also stronger climate resilient tools.

Digital transformation and AI capabilities emerged as priorities as well, as many MSMEs expressed excitement about using AI to create marketing content, improve customer engagement, and expand internationally.

The Government's MSME Strategic Plan, which is a blueprint for our MSME Sector development, is currently in the final stages of preparation, and it will directly address those demands. It will emphasise collaboration between Government, development partners, industry leaders and MSMEs themselves, ensuring every enterprise across Fiji has the tools it needs to succeed. These insights are directly informing our National MSME Strategic Plan, now in its final stages, which will be Fiji's first integrated blueprint for building a competitive and future-ready MSME Sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are positioning MSME for Fiji's economic future, and at the same time, to ensure equity and future readiness. Our prosperity must be shared and our growth inclusive, with a special focus on women, youth, the unemployed and rural communities. These measures are designed to elevate voices and ideas that may previously have gone unheard. We are ensuring access to skills training, affordable finance, market opportunities, and the digital literacy skills development required for 21st-century businesses.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our vision is for MSMEs and co-operatives to compete locally and thrive in regional and global markets. By fostering digital literacy, e-commerce capacity, and export market access, we are future-proofing our MSMEs - helping them to adapt, innovate and scale their businesses far beyond our shores.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, each story of success, from Nadamole to Rakiraki to Gau, illustrates the tangible transformation possible when MSME support is paired with local ingenuity and hard work.

The Ministry remains steadfast in its commitment to empowering micro, small, and medium enterprises, using robust monitoring systems to build a more resilient, inclusive and vibrant economy. This Government has moved MSME support from *ad hoc* assistance to a professional, data-driven and nationally integrated system - something Fiji has never had before.

The path forward is clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the commitment is strong, and the results are already visible. Together, we are building an entrepreneurial Fiji, where every idea nurtured from the grassroots upwards is given the chance to blossom. May God bless you; God bless this august House and God bless our nation.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Minister for his speech today with respect to our MSME Sector. One of the most important parts of our economy is the MSME Sector. They form about 80 percent of the businesses, contributing about 18 percent to our GDP.

What we must do, and this is in line with what the honourable Prime Minister spoke about this morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to aspire to contribute more towards the GDP. I know he has mentioned about 40 percent, but this is a developed country. If we look at it as a comparison, the thing that we can do or learn from are countries like Japan, where SMEs contribute about 50 percent to the GDP. Similar to anything in this world, there are pitfalls.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the topic is quite relevant in terms of resilience and strength and building an inclusive MSME Sector. One of the things that has been spoken about in South-East Asia and many other countries where MSMEs are at the forefront is insurance, and I know the honourable Minister would have this on board. The UNDP and a few other UN organisations are actually organising something with respect to insurance for our MSMEs, Sir, especially in light of the fact that we are vulnerable to climate change, et cetera, so it makes sense that we have something in there to protect it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, MSMEs have been quite the backbone for us, and they prove to be a pillar of economic strength and resilience, which came to the fore during COVID and just post-COVID. As I have said, one of the other barriers that the MSMEs face is access to finance. I know the former Minister had worked very hard to ensure the issue could be dealt with quickly, so that we could have

easy access to finance for these MSMEs.

We must remember that a lot of the conglomerates around the world all started as MSMEs. What is stopping our MSMEs from becoming huge and big companies when they can do? In light of the fact that we are looking to diversify, and diversification is at the forefront of our economic plans, at the end of the day, it is important that this particular sector be given the respect that it deserves and needs in order to grow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thirdly, there is an issue of capacity building. Again, I go back to what the honourable Prime Minister spoke about this morning. Countries like Japan can only help us in terms of our capacity building for our MSMEs, and we have institutions here that have provided a lot of assistance to. I know the Market Development Facility has done a lot for our MSME Sector, and they continue to do so. Our development partners have done so, but there is always room for improvement.

One of the dangers that our MSMEs also face is the everchanging landscape in terms of AI, in terms of the digital landscape. When we look at that perspective in terms of the teachings that we are handing down to the MSMEs, it is important that they know the pitfalls of the digital landscape. It is a huge area of growth for us. As I have said, the gap is in the insurance part in terms of our MSMEs, but it is extremely important that we nurture it well.

I am happy to hear that there is an extension of the YES Programme, which is a huge programme under the Ministry. One of the things also that is hugely commendable and very important to us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the database that is actually being done, that provides us with wealth of information with respect to what we can do, and in terms of the budget, what we are able to do to assist these particular MSMEs. Just like anywhere in the world, they form the backbone of the economy, and we are constantly looking at other avenues.

As I have said, diversification is needed. We have a lot of growth. We have a lot of young people who are innovative, et cetera, and these are the programmes that they can be involved in. One example, as I had mentioned about Japan, and clear one for us to learn from is the Japanese Small and Medium Enterprise Sector, which forms the backbone of its high degree of technological development. When we think of MSMEs, we must not just think of it as an agriculture-based sector or a small tourism operator, they have gone to another level. It is a place that we can actually learn from.

In fact, many SMEs in Japan actually possess expertise that can only help a country like us. These are the places that we need to look at in terms of trying to get out the best for our own MSMEs. It is also something that has in it, retention. Instead of our young people leaving for pastures overseas, et cetera, if you could encourage them to stay, and if they are starting their own business, there are incentives that are given to them so that they can grow from here. Why not? We should be able to do that, and we should be doing that in order for us to encourage them to stay instead of leaving straight out of university.

One of the programmes that was developed specifically to do that was the YES Programme, to ensure that our young people actually stayed and start their own businesses. Instead of being in employment, they were job creators, and that was the idea behind it.

All in all, I commend the honourable Minister for his Statement on the MSME Sector. It is a sector that needs to be driven. As you have rightfully mentioned about the Business Assistance Programme, it has not really been taken up too quickly. I think there is probably a little bit more work on it, but there are other programmes, like the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme,

and a few others that are within the Ministry that are only helpful to the MSME Sector, and we must ensure that we allow it to grow.

The aspirational figure of 40 percent of the GDP is phenomenal, but it can be done. We must have that within our mind to try and get that done, but at the same time, as I have said earlier, we must make sure that we take care of the pitfalls, especially in terms of insurance, et cetera, so that they are protected, and they can be resilient enough because of climate change, they can be damaged.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Construction of New Court Facilities (Question No. 266/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General inform Parliament whether the Ministry is considering the construction of new Court facilities and the expansion or upgrading of existing Court facilities around the country?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. For the first time in our history since Independence in 1970, Fiji is witnessing judicial milestones that speak not only to progress, but to the heart of what justice truly means for our people. These are not just infrastructural developments; they are statements of commitment, and prove that this Coalition Government sees every Fijian, no matter where they live.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year history was made. A High Court sitting was held in Rabi Island for the first time in 55 years. For decades, many of our remote communities felt that justice was something they had to travel often at great financial and emotional cost. But this time, justice travelled to them. It reached their doorstep, their island, their home. Similarly, the Court of Appeal convened a full bench in Ba for the very first time. Another powerful reminder that justice must not be confined to Suva but must go where our people are.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Court of Appeal is scheduled to sit in Labasa, and for the first time ever, the High Court will sit in Taveuni, a remarkable milestone for Northern and maritime areas. All of these has happened under the Coalition Government. These achievements underscore a simple, but deeply important truth, that is, this Government is delivering justice where people live, not just where court buildings already exist.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the past nine years, the Judiciary has operated from the Veiuto Complex. During this period, major renovations amounting to about \$21 million has strengthened judicial services and upgraded working conditions for judges, staff, and court users. The key improvements include the following:

- (1) Refurbished and fully furnished Court of Appeal and Supreme Court courtrooms.
- (2) A dedicated Court of Appeal and Supreme Court library.
- (3) Modernised Judges' Chambers and secretary's office with updated technology.
- (4) Enhanced registries and workstations for court support staff.
- (5) Renovated Public Service Disciplinary Tribunal (PSDT) transport and disciplinary unit officers.
- (6) New offices and the mediation rooms for the Fiji Mediation Centre.

- (7) Improved Small Claims Tribunal (SCT) facilities.
- (8) A dedicated judicial training room.
- (9) Upgraded Legal Practitioners Unit facilities.
- (10) Secure storage containers for disposed files and proof cupboards.

Now, the groundwork has begun on a new judicial tower at the site of the old Parliament building – a powerful symbol of how far we have come and how far we intend to go.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beyond bricks and mortar, our judiciary is undergoing one of the most important digital transformations in its history. Digitalisation is not merely about technology. It is about fairness. It is about efficiency; ensuring that justice delivery keeps pace with modern needs. It allows judicial officers to make decisions consistently, transparently, and with systems that reflect global best practice.

The Judiciary Capital Development Unit is implementing two flagship projects – the proposed Lautoka High Court Complex and the new fully-fledged Nadi Court facility. Procurement is underway and construction will proceed once the project lead consultant is secured. Plans are also well in advance for a fully-fledged Nausori Courthouse and a new Savusavu Courthouse, recognising population growth and economic activity. We are now acting on building for Fiji's future, ensuring that judicial services grow alongside our nation.

Access to justice must be felt by all Fijians, including those in rural and maritime areas. Our people should not have to rely on makeshift courtrooms in police stations and village halls. These spaces, while used out of necessity, do not reflect the dignity or independence of the judiciary. Priority court facilities will be built in Dreketi, Macuata; Tukavesi Government Station in Cakaudrove; Koro, Lomaiviti (Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe you are familiar with the island); Lakeba, Lau; Vanuabalavu, Lau; Rotuma; Nacula in Yasawa; and Vunisea in Kavala, Kadavu.

A new Keiyasi Courthouse in Navosa is being tendered, with construction to begin once procurement is finalised. The upgrades in this financial year include the Nabouwalu Courthouse; Tagimoucia Courthouse - High Court in Lautoka; and Suva Family Court Division. These upgrades ensure accessibility, safety, and modern standards for the people who rely on these services every day.

Access to justice is not merely a domestic priority. It is a global commitment under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which calls on nations to promote peaceful, inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, inclusive institutions.

Fiji is honouring this commitment through its National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050, which places accessible justice at the heart of good governance. The key strategies include:

- (1) modernising the justice system through digital innovation to improve responsiveness and efficiency;
- (2) strengthening legal inclusion for vulnerable groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities, and those in remote communities;
- (3) community engagement and legal awareness to improve public understanding and confidence;
- (4) transparency, accountability, and good governance across all justice institutions; and
- (5) a comprehensive law and justice sector reform roadmap with pillars focusing on justice, efficiency, anti-corruption and oversight and legal awareness. These reforms ensure that justice is not only available, but accessible, inclusive and meaningful to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, access to justice is a lifeline for survivors of violence. It is the pathway to safety, protection and accountability. By expanding court services, modernising systems and strengthening outreach, this Government is ensuring that women and girls, particularly those in rural and maritime communities, can seek justice without fear, without delay and with dignity.

Gender-based violence is not just a social issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a justice issue, and this Coalition Government is responding decisively with reforms that protect survivors, empower communities and uphold human rights. These developments are fiscal, digital and community-based, and reflect a government that listens. A government that plans and a government that delivers. A government determined to make justice more accessible, more efficient and more dignified for every Fijian. Our message is very clear, justice must not only be done, but it must also be seen to be done across every island, every community and every corner of our nation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, the question is related to the upgrading of court facilities and expansion. In terms of upgrading of the facilities in the court, have we been able to digitally transfer all the files of previous decisions, et cetera, onto a digital platform all around Fiji, or are we in the process of doing so in terms of records like probates, et cetera, that are there? Is it digitally done, or are we in the process of actually getting it done for all the spaces around the country?

Secondly, Sir, if I may be permitted to do so, any new facility being built, will it be digitally ready to accept and do what we need to do in terms of getting into that space?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the process, part of my response to the question from honourable *turaga naita*. I will respond to that in terms of the new information system that the judiciary will probably implement, by next year.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the honourable Minister is there has been a lot of talks about moving the whole Judiciary to Veiuto so that Parliament can get more space for parliamentary purposes. What is the progress in moving the judiciary from the Parliament precinct to Veiuto so that we can have more spaces for Parliament?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I think that is a new question. I have just outlined the whole apparatus of the changes that the judiciary is implementing, and we must take cognisance of that Judiciary is also an organ of the State. I have no direct answer to that, but what I have outlined is the work that is in progress.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister; you have talked about court facilities in Dreketi, Tukavesi, Koro, Kadavu and Vanuabalavu. Do we have definite timelines for these projects, honourable Minister, if you can clarify?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- My apologies, I do not have a time, but those are the plans. We have done more, honourable Usamate, than what your previous Attorney-General did in the last 16 years. The record speaks for itself. Let that be clear! If we are given 16 years, we have done more. For the projects that I have outlined, some have the tender process in progress. If you ask more specific questions, we are able to provide you with that, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Question. Honourable Members, if you can bear with me, I have reshuffled the Questions in view of some urgent matters that have arisen from one of the Members. If honourable Members accept, I will move Question No. 297/2025 forward in view of some urgent matters that have arisen in respect to one of the Ministers.

Fiji's 3rd National Climate Commitment - Paris Agreement
(Question. No. 297/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on Fiji's Third National Climate Commitment Under the Paris Agreement?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the Oral Question, let me respond to the honourable Leader of the Opposition's comments this morning while responding to the honourable Prime Minister's Ministerial Statement because it has been reported in the media on the capacity of the COP30 Delegation, especially technical staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Director of Meteorological Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to assure this august House, members of the public and the media that the Delegation had covered the 14 thematic areas, including agriculture, and also those issues that were supposed to be covered by Meteorological Services. The key negotiators and technical staff attended all those meetings, including the 94 meetings and side events, so that was well covered. Also, those lead negotiators took the lead in receiving instructions and updating the relevant Ministries before they took up Fiji's stance in those negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide an update to this august House on Fiji's 3rd Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0). Fiji has a longstanding record of climate leadership which includes the honourable Leader of the Opposition as the former Climate Champion. We became a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1993, way back when the honourable Prime Minister today was the Prime Minister then, during the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Government. We were the first country in the world to ratify the Paris Agreement in 2016, followed by an updated NDC in 2020, affirming our commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji formally submitted its NDC 3.0 to the UNFCCC on 6th November, 2025. This was also submitted to the United Nations General Assembly's (UNGA) 18th Session in September by the honourable Prime Minister. This submission fulfils our international obligation, as well as our national legal mandate under the Climate Change Act 2021, which requires the preparation and communication of successive NDCs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NDC 3.0 has been developed at a time of heightened climate urgency. The latest assessments from the Intergovernmental Panel of the Climate Change (IPCC), which the honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about this morning, are clear that the world is rapidly approaching the limits of what the planet can safely absorb. Overshooting the 1.5-degree threshold would mean the amplification of every climate hazard that has already threatened Fiji, such as rising sea levels, more intense tropical cyclones, collapsing coral systems, and the destabilising impacts on food security, infrastructure and economy. The latest IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) reveals that small island States will continue to bear these consequences first, most severely and often irreversibly, if urgent climate adaptation and mitigation measures are not put in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in July this year, the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) advisory opinion further reinforced this reality, not simply as a scientific warning but a matter of international legal responsibility. The ICJ confirms that States have obligations to act consistently with the best available signs to prevent further climate harm and to protect rights, lives, livelihood and vulnerable population, including those in low-lying and climate-exposed nations. Fiji's NDC 3.0 reflects this responsibility by aligning our commitments to both, the scientific evidence and the legal expectation,

now placed upon international communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the preparation of the NDC 3.0 was grounded in rigorous technical analysis - extensive modelling was taken using real emission data collected by our national inventory reports and the biennial transparency reporting system. These datasets enable sector-specific projections, scenario testing and mitigation pathways across energy, transport, waste, and agriculture, ensuring that the NDC targets are credible, evidence-based and implementable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NDC 3.0 significantly emphasises Fiji's ambition. It introduces a target to reduce 36 percent of emission from the energy sector by 2035, relative to a business-as-usual scenario. Of this, 12 percent will be achieved through domestic efforts, while 24 percent will require international support. It also affirms our aim to reach close to 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030 and 100 percent by 2035.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first time, Fiji's NDC expands beyond the energy sector to include mitigation targets for agriculture and waste, including manure management, biogas systems for smallholder farmers, and reduction in methane emission from landfill and waterways - one of the questions that was raised yesterday by the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NDC 3.0 places strong emphasis on adaptation. Also, for the first time, it introduces a national definition for loss and damage, recognising that some impacts cannot be avoided or adapted to. Our NDCs commit Fiji to strengthening systems, data, financial mechanisms, and institutional arrangement to respond to unavoidable climate practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the NDC 3.0 is divided into unconditional and conditional components. While Fiji will act decisively within its means, most of the mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage commitments are conditional and will rely on access to new and additional finance, technology transfer and capacity building. To support implementation, Fiji will progress the development of the coasted implementation plan to mobilise investment and drive coordinated action across Government, communities and the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, the NDC 3.0 is not simply a policy statement, it is Fiji's declaration that we will respond to climate crisis with a full weight of science, legality, and national responsibility. Fiji's submission on 6th November, 2025 to the UNFCCC reaffirms our unwavering commitment to safeguarding the 1.5 degree guardrail, a guardrail defined by the IPCC and reinforced by the International Court of Justice. It signals that Fiji will continue to lead, to demand accountability, and to protect our people, our economy, our sovereignty, and our future in the face of the greatest threat of our time.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question, and I think I have asked this previously. We thank the honourable Minister for the update, but is his Ministry or Government considering tabling the 3rd Nationally Determined Contribution Report to Parliament?

The reason why I am asking this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is, again, on the role of Parliament in the achievement of our global commitments and the SDG goals as well. You would recall, Sir, in the IPU, this is one of the main areas that Parliaments are focusing on, not only as watchdogs, but the bridge also between our international commitments and our local action. Is the Ministry considering tabling the NDC so that it can be debated as well in Parliament?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our NDC 3.0 was launched at COP30 last week and surely, it will be tabled in Parliament for the benefit of Parliament and also the IPU processes where Parliament has got some SDG goals to also report on. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have a Business Committee Meeting soon after this, so I we will have an early lunch break now, to allow the Business Committee to meet. We will resume this afternoon at 2.30 p.m.

To the Business Committee members, make your way to the Small Committee Room for our meeting. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.11 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish you to join me in warmly welcoming the students, teachers and parents of Nadakuni District School in Naitasiri.

On behalf of the honourable Members, I warmly welcome you to Parliament and I hope that this visit will expand your understanding of how your Parliament works and provide you with significant awareness of the role that Parliament plays in safeguarding your democracy. Once again, thank you, and welcome to your Parliament.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order - Order 80, to address a matter arising from a social media post I shared, which has caused concern and hurt some honourable Members and members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to place on record that the content I shared was directly extracted from *The Fiji Times* Quick View's column, a reputable media company in Fiji, a media public opinion that already existed in the public domain. However, I acknowledge that my decision to share it has per my right of freedom of expression, even as a reference to a published article, which may have been misinterpreted in a way that hurt our iTaukei colleagues and our communities. For that Mr. Speaker, I generally regret sharing the published article.

Mr. Speaker, I humbly apologise to the honourable Prime Minister, this august House and especially to our iTaukei honourable Members of Parliament, if I may have, in any way, caused pain, discomfort or emotional distress.

Mr. Speaker, unity, respect and cultural sensitivity must always guide our conduct, both inside and outside of this Chamber. I remain committed to upholding those values in ensuring that my future engagements reflect the responsibility entrusted in me as a Member of Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member. Pursuant to Point of Order 80, there is no further debate required on that. However, the House will take note of it, as well as the honourable Members of Parliament. Thank you.

We will now continue from where we left off. We will go on to the second Oral Question of today.

Progress of Ongoing Works at the Ellington Wharf
(Question No. 292/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the progress of the ongoing works at the Ellington Wharf in Rakiraki and when it will be opened to the public?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform this august House that the timeline for the opening of Ellington Wharf in Rakiraki has been set for 13th December, 2025, or thereafter. While the initial forecast was scheduled for a week earlier, three weeks has been allocated, allowing us to ensure the proper curing of concrete works on the jetty to complete the remaining safety aspects, including the jetty fender, in compliance with Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji standards, carrying out rock armouring of the sides, clear the site and extend the seal with

upgraded pavement to the jetty head. Currently, all works on the superstructure of the jetty has been completed, with only final safety measures pending and the rock armouring of the sides to protect the road to be undertaken starting next week.

Additionally, the Fiji Roads Authority has conducted significant roadworks on the existing seal from King's Road to the end of the seal. The remaining unsealed section of the road leading to the jetty will be upgraded once all remaining works are finalised, ensuring that the site is fully ready and safe for public use.

Redevelopment will significantly enhance our transportation infrastructure along the wharf. Once again, it services vessels effectively and also serve as a vital and improved transportation hub for our people and seafarers in the Western Division, Vanua Levu and the wider maritime communities. We remain committed to providing reliable and efficient services to support our communities and facilitate economic growth and the movement of our people.

Plans for a Teacher Protection Policy
(Question No. 294/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament if the Ministry has any plans to have a Teacher Protection Policy?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question, something that was not developed during his time when he was Head of the Human Resource Department at the Ministry of Education. It was something that the teachers were requesting him to do, but now he has taken the opportunity to ask Government whether we have attended to some of these things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education takes into serious consideration the teachers' well-being and safety, and has developed an Educators Protection Policy, formerly known as Teacher Protection Policy, as the honourable Member referred to. It was revised, after consultation, and changed from Teachers Protection Policy to Educators Protection Policy, not only to safeguard teachers, but other education and teaching staff who usually come and visit schools in accordance with relevant legislations and relevant laws.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I continue further, I also want to advise the honourable Member that yesterday, we had passed the second reading of the Education Bill 2025 and part of the contents that is covered in this Bill is regarding offences and penalties given to those who insult or abuse teachers. That has taken into consideration some of the concerns that have been raised regarding teacher safety.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because of these sequence of events, the Policy will have to take into consideration those elements that have been included in this revised Education Bill that was presented yesterday, to ensure that we are in compliance with the requirements and pertinent issues as highlighted.

Sir, once the Policy is finalised, we will follow through the process of making consultations and getting opinions from the Office of the Solicitor-General before we finalise this Educators Protection Policy.

HON. H. CHAND.- I thank the honourable Minister for updating the House that the Ministry is coming up with a Policy for our teachers. Our teachers definitely need protection and this year,

three teachers were assaulted in the school premises, and that was during school hours.

Last week, I received a letter from a headteacher, who is having sleepless nights because she is being bullied and harassed by one school manager. I have forwarded that email to the honourable Minister. She wrote to the Ministry because she feels very scared, she is being bullied and is frightened by the ongoing harassment by the school manager. The email was sent to the Ministry of Education, so my question is, why was there no response from the Ministry of Education? Why is the Ministry of Education very slow in responding to serious cases of this nature?

MR. SPEAKER.- It appears like a statement to me, rather than a question, Minister. Do you wish to respond?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Member is fully aware of the processes within the Ministry of Education. For any instances of incidents, there is a process in-house where PDU is usually involved to address and investigate matters, so that process takes time. It is not something that has just developed during this period, it is something that has been inherited. For processes, there is no timeline, and he should be well aware of the issues and the processes of the Disciplinary Unit. If the matters are of great concern, there is also avenues where the teacher can explore in terms of reporting matters to Police to assist in this scenario.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully agree with honourable Chand. In fact, I must declare my interest as the manager of Baulevu High School. I have often seen our teachers and students being bullied at times, definitely, by some outsiders, or a parent or guardian, who comes to the school. I would like to ask the honourable Minister, what can be done to safeguard the teachers?

When an outsider comes in, he will be confrontational and will have lots of questions, and maybe he has already posted on *Facebook*, but I know Facebook is controlled and some people may have deleted it.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member should be aware that most of the schools are controlled by the controlling authority, through their management. The honourable Member is fully aware of his responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing of teachers in their respective school falls with the controlling authority, and that is something that the school management should also take in as part of their roles and responsibilities in the schools.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I had inadvertently omitted to inform that the third Oral Question for today, Question No. 293/2025 has been dropped from the Order Paper, as it had been addressed through the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister this morning.

Reclamation of Ancestral Land – Munia, Vanuabalavu, Lau
(Question No. 295/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the progress of efforts by the people of Munia in Vanuabalavu, Lau, in reclaiming their ancestral land?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to provide an answer to the question that has been posed by honourable Matasawalevu.

First, allow me, Sir, to join you and the rest of the House in congratulating the students from

Naitasiri who are joining us here today. It seems like a Naitasiri day today, Mr. Speaker. They were here in the morning, and they are here again this afternoon. In fact, they were here yesterday, another school, that is. So, we not only have a happy Minister for Finance and Minister for Education, not forgetting honourable Qereqeretabua, who is a *vasu* of Naitasiri, but we also have a very happy Minister of Policing, to welcome the students from Naitasiri, their teachers and their supporters.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I want to say my well-wishes to all the athletes, the teachers, parents and supporters of the primary school children who are participating today and tomorrow in the Tuckers Athletics Meet which is underway. To Dilo and the Suva Rua Team, I wish you all the very best in the next two days.

Mr. Speaker, the island of Munia was agreed to be purchased by Government in its programme in 1989. Approximately, 1,110 acres or 449.5 hectares of land, was bought by the Government in 1989 for a value of \$450,000. The Yavusa Munia comprises of four *Mataqali* - Mataqali Marama, Mataqali Nakia, Mataqali Narocake and Mataqali Sawailau.

I am happy to report to the House, Mr. Speaker, that their repayment, after a lot of hard yards being covered, a lot of *solu* and everyone pitching in from the four *Mataqali* and for those who supported them, and their undertaking to repay Government of the \$450,000 that they managed, after 36 years and six months, to pay off the balance of \$56,021.92 cents, and that was settled on 17th of November, a few days ago.

Mr. Speaker, after the settlement and the final payment to the Ministry of Lands, which we have received and receipted, we now look forward to the formation of their trust. Once their trust documents have been completed, then we will finalise the last chapter of the conveyance of Munia Island back to its traditional owners.

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Can the honourable Minister explain the processes involved, should a *mataqali* or landowning unit would like to reclaim back their ancestral land, just like the people of Munia in Vanuabalavu have done?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, I suppose in answering that question, I would probably say that it begins with dialogue between traditional owners of freehold land and those that are currently the freeholders or their names appear on the freehold title - that is the beginning. As I have said, when we rolled out the Buy Back Scheme 3.0, that it is an arm's length deal. It is between a willing buyer and a willing seller. It is upon that platform or foundation that the Government would come in with the funds, provided it is commensurate with the money that we have set aside every year to facilitate for the Buy Back Scheme, we would be happy to facilitate.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, just a quick question on similar issues. Apart from Munia, are there other communities that are also facing the same problem? I recall that Weilagi in Taveuni at some stage, they also went through the Buy Back Scheme, I do not know where they are now. So, are there any other communities that are facing the same problems and what are we doing to address that?

HON. F.W.R VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, on the payment side apart from Munia, there are other land-owning units who have completed their payments including, of course, the land-owning unit of Navatu, trying to bring the handover back, hopefully, in the new year once the trust is re-established. There are, of course, stories where difficulties have been faced. In those instances, as has been practised in the past, the State has leased out the land to people on a short-term lease so that we are able to help the landowners pay to Government.

When we lease them out, we take the lease monies, and we account it to the landowners. So, it counts towards the repayment that they have had to make. It is the only way in which we think has been successful and we find that it should be successful. We have done that with Welagi, we have also done that with the freehold land in Dawasamu and it is going towards the repayment of their Buy Back Scheme.

Plans to Deal with Lack of Skilled Labourers
(Question No. 296/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament on plans to deal with the lack of skilled labourers that have been moving to Australia and New Zealand?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lack of skilled workers due to labour migration both to Australia and New Zealand continues to be a critical challenge for our economy, industries and the sustainability of essential services. This rose steeply post-COVID due to both countries relaxing their rules because of the shortage that they are facing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji like many other Pacific Island countries is experiencing significant outward labour mobility. It is important to note that we cannot stop workers from seeking overseas employment opportunities as it is their right to do so. The Government fully recognises that labour mobility provides families with better income and contributes to the national remittances. However, this movement also creates immediate skills gaps across key sectors such as construction, engineering, healthcare, transportation, hospitality and the list goes on.

To respond to these challenges, the Coalition Government has acted decisively with various initiatives designed not only to fill the immediate gaps but to strengthen Fiji's long-term skills development. The Government has already implemented several key programmes that directly expand our national capacity for skills development and these include:

- Scholarships through the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service with a strong focus on priority areas experiencing critical shortages.
- Awards for the TVET courses have been increased substantially.
- As alluded to by the honourable Minister for Education yesterday, the Coalition Government has converted the loans into scholarships and has forgiven all the existing loans that people had.
- We have strengthened and incentivised the apprenticeship scheme, enabling young Fijians to gain practical industry-based skills while earning at the same time, and we are topping up their wages by \$2 to make it \$5 an hour. These workers, once they have completed their apprenticeship, will be bonded to serve the country for an equal number of years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a history to vocational centres and technical colleges, and at the expense of repeating, I wish to inform this august House, as well as those who are listening and watching from outside, that after 2014-2015, sometime then, the then government opened 28 technical colleges in the country. While doing so, they closed all those technical vocational centres that were attached to secondary schools, at that point in time, so that was the pathway that was being

followed for TVET training. After a few years, the technical colleges were suddenly closed at a month's notice, and then there was a void - there was nothing left for several years in terms of technical vocational training.

Once we came in, we have reopened the TVET centres attached to the secondary schools, and I have been told by the honourable Minister for Education that the numbers have also increased now. Several technical colleges have been reopened, and Pacific Polytech is actively involved in opening them up and providing the necessary training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just received some details on Pacific Polytech, because there were a lot of questions being asked about this institution. From October last year to now, Polytech has graduated 2,086 students with micro-qualifications. Over 98 percent of these are indigenous youth who had been left out of the mainstream.

In Nabua alone, 1,017 students were trained. These youth come from areas like Raiwaqa, Vatuwaqa, Nabua, Kinoya and the surrounding areas. In Lami, where Polytech has set up a centre, already 31 students from Qauia, Kalekana, Valenicina, et cetera, have received micro-qualifications. A total of 53 students from the same area have enrolled for a course to start in early December at Qauia. Throughout Fiji, micro-qualification programmes are held for the youth who have no skills. This is real upskilling of the youth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during 2025, over 2,800 students have enrolled in national qualifications. National qualifications are those qualifications which have been developed by the Higher Education Commission in Fiji. These are trade skills in sought-after areas like carpentry, plumbing, electrical, automotive trades, hospitality, et cetera. These are what Fiji needs.

We provide ongoing support to institutions such as National Training and Productivity Centre, Pacific Polytech, Montfort Boys Town, Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD) at Nadave, Navuso Agricultural School and Technical College. All these institutions play a major role in producing highly skilled, job ready workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the extension of the retirement age to 60 and the re-engagement of retirees to relevant fields where there is a need, in terms of skills shortage, that allows them to share experiences and institutional knowledge. As alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister in his Ministerial Statement this morning, the recent signing of the MoA with the Government of Japan, with this signing, Fiji will benefit from advanced skills training, opportunities and the transfer of Japanese workplace culture and productivity practices. The Japanese are well known for their soft skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while expanding training opportunities is essential, we must also address the reasons why people leave our shores. These workers do not always leave for higher pay, many leave because they feel undervalued, lack of opportunities for career progression, unsupported, unfairly treated due to non-compliance with the minimum terms and conditions of employment by employers. Through workplace, inspections alone conducted by the Ministry in the last 5 years, we have recovered something like \$6 million plus in unpaid wages and paid out to the affected workers.

I also wish to reiterate, that this is not only government's responsibility, I call on the employers, both in the public and private sectors, to work and improve their retention strategies, leadership culture and succession planning. This must be embedded in organisational workplace strategies ensuring continuity. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government remains committed to ensuring that Fiji has a strong and sustainable labour force while we respect the right of our workers, to take up overseas employment opportunities, we are equally focussed on strengthening our local

workforce, protecting worker welfare and supporting employers to build workplaces where people want to stay and work.

Before I take my seat, I stand in solidarity with the Thursdays in Black Movement against gender-based violence. Men who hit women are the worst cowards. There are clear policies and guidelines at workplaces to ensure their workplace harassment or sexual harassment is not committed. We are strengthening labour laws to make sure that sexual harassment at workplaces is minimized or eradicated and these laws are going to be effective once our ERA has been passed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all those women and girls who are in any way harassed or victims of such horrendous acts to report to the relevant authorities and do not shy away, because it is very important that such perpetrators are taken to task.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his detailed explanation. I have just heard about Pacific Polytech having graduated around 2,000 micro-qualified people. I wanted to ask the honourable Minister if he can clarify what micro-qualification is and do they contribute to skilled labour after they graduate?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I invite the honourable Koroilavesau to accompany me one day to Pacific Polytech in Nabua so that we can observe and listen to the trainers and the lecturers to fully understand how it works. I am told by the Pacific Polytech management that our Members have been invited to come and visit them and get to know exactly how they are working and what they are doing.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have no interest in joining one of the biggest education scams in this country, which is Pacific Polytech. While dealing with Pacific Polytech, the honourable Minister has given numbers of graduates coming out from Pacific Polytech, we have never heard from the honourable Minister on the number of these graduates who have secured a place in the workforce. Can the honourable Minister give this number so that we can get to know how many graduates from Pacific Polytech have been employed in the workforce?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I think that is a fair question. How many are in the job market?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a new question, and I will ask Pacific Polytech to provide the answer, and let the Member have it.

HON. J.N. NAND.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Is the Ministry exploring international recruitments through agreements with other countries, such as India, to fulfil critical gaps like construction, healthcare and IT?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Yes, we all know that we are recruiting workers from abroad, including Asia and the Philippines. We are in the process of signing a MOA with India as well to be able to access workers from India.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, have we actually carried out or has the Ministry carried out an assessment to identify the major gaps that will require attention in terms of whether it is informing immigration or whether it is something that is required at a budget time to address.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, the TSLs has carried out a study and that is how they are awarding scholarships proportionately. The Ministry of Public Enterprises is also working together with my Ministry to do a further survey during this year.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister inform us if the Government will continue funding Polytech knowing that they are not in compliance with the Higher Education?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just clarify. Funding that is provided by Government is announced in the budget. The relevant authorities are mandated to administer that and, in this case, it is the Fiji Higher Education Commission. It is for the Fiji Higher Education to release funds according to the approvals that they provide.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order, honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Standing Order 62(1). The honourable Maharaj unfortunately started his question by referring to the setup of Polytech as a scam. He used the word “scam” so he is imputing that the whole setup is a scam.

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Let us give the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament the chance to explain further.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What I am saying, he refers to the setup which was being explained, referring to Polytech as a scam. A scam is a fraudulent setup. So, what I am saying that, that should be withdrawn because it is not a fraudulent setup.

What I am saying, that should be withdrawn because it is not a fraudulent setup. It is already approved, legislated and we had budgeted for it. I contend that that should be withdrawn – the use of the word “scam”. By using that, in reference to the Standing Order, the honourable Minister is explaining or legitimising a scam in his explanation or his answer to the question. However, it is not a scam, it is a legitimate setup.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Maharaj, what I would like to do, because I did not hear properly, I would like to have a look at the *Daily Hansard* and then I will make a ruling on your objection, honourable Tuisawau, tomorrow.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a clarification, Standing Order 62(1) refers to, and I quote: “When speaking a member must not impute improper motive to any other member.” I did not say anything about any other Member. The Standing Order is wrong itself on the point he is raising. I did not say anything about any Member, and that can be verified from the *Daily Hansard* tomorrow, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Were you referring to the report?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- That is why I would like to have a look at the *Daily Hansard*. We will leave it at that. You will hear from me tomorrow.

Update on the IRDF 2009 Review Report
(Question No. 299/2025)

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 Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) 2009 Review Report?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. You may recall that earlier in this financial year, I provided some insight on the background of the Integrated Rural Development Framework 2009, and I had to respond to a similar question on this same subject. I am appreciative of this opportunity to provide an update on the review of the IRDF, which I had mentioned then.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the support of the various Ministries involved in the IRDF review process. I would like to acknowledge the support of the United Nations Development Programme under its Governance for Resilient Development in the Pacific Programme (Gov4Res). The IRDF has been the guiding document for the Ministry's service delivery to the rural people since its approval in 2009. It was intended to be a national framework, designed to bridge the gap between bottom-up community planning and top-down national decision-making. However, it has been a challenge to the Ministry when the Constitution was approved in 2013, because the Ministry would have to manoeuvre its operations within the supreme legal framework of the country.

It was crucial for the review to be undertaken – a significant work that I am really proud to have progressed with since the Coalition Government came into office. I would also like to note that the review represents the first deliverable under the Ministry's Change Management Programme. This is an institutional reform initiative aimed at modernising the planning, coordination and implementation of development across Fiji's rural and maritime communities.

Completion of the review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, marks a significant milestone for the Coalition Government. In view of the evolving development landscape, it is essential that the Ministry operates under a clear, modern, and coherent framework that will guide its future direction towards fulfilling Government's vision for resilient and inclusive rural communities.

After 15 years of implementation, the review was timely to assess the framework's relevance, achievements and challenges to determine how rural development can now be repositioned for the next decade under a new National Rural Development Policy. The review, conducted over seven months, employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including document analysis, stakeholder workshops, interviews, *talanoa* sessions, online surveys and validation exercises with key external partners and Ministry Senior Management.

While the IRDF 2009 was instrumental in its time, its long-term impact was severely limited by systemic issues. The review highlighted some key challenges such as:

(1) Incomplete Decentralised Planning

The goal of bottom-up planning was undermined by unfinished divisional development plans. This indicates that the decentralised system for translating community priorities into actionable funded projects was never fully operationalised or sustained.

(2) Poor Vertical and Horizontal Coordination

The major challenge was a failure to achieve true integration. For horizontal integration, there was poor coordination among various government agencies and development partners, which led to fragmented efforts and duplication, diluting the overall impact. There were inconsistencies between community priorities and top-down national policies, meaning there was a disconnect in funding and strategic priorities.

(3) Limited Funding and Inefficiencies

Inadequate funding allocations, coupled with systemic inefficiencies in resource management collectively impeded the framework's goals. This points to a failure in mainstreaming rural development funding effectively across the national budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the findings revealed a strategic opportunity for the forthcoming NRDP to address systemic challenges and reimagine Fiji's rural development architecture. This will require strengthened interagency coordination, participatory and inclusive governance, integration of traditional leadership structures, improved resource allocation, and mainstreaming of climate resilience and sustainability. The review's central contribution lies in articulating a philosophy of change and a set of actionable recommendations to drive reforms through NRDP.

I will talk briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about the six core reform principles of this philosophy of change that have been identified from the review of the IRDF. These principles will guide the Ministry's transformation process, ensuring that future rural development is inclusive, risk-informed and resilient.

The six core principles we are now applying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are designed to break away from the old siloed, top-down way of doing things. We are shifting from simply delivering projects to building resilient and empowered rural economies and societies:

(1) Rural Development is Everyone's Business

Rural development cannot sit only with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. It must be a national agenda, driven by the Ministry of Finance, the Public Service Commission, line Ministries, the private sector, civil society and development partners. Only then can we mobilise resources at scale and deliver real transformation.

(2) Different Solutions for Different Contexts

We are moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Development in a maritime province is not the same as development in Naitasiri, or in Namosi. Each area has its own realities, and our approach must reflect those differences. That also means strengthening the link between rural and urban areas, especially as issues like drugs and rural to urban migration cross these boundaries.

(3) People First - Community First

This principle shifts our focus from just meeting basic needs to addressing root causes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are reimagining development around community aspirations, empowerment, economic participation, leadership development, and not just delivering infrastructure.

(4) Evidence-Based and Integrated Solutions

We are integrating rural development databases into one unified platform to reduce duplication, improve data integrity, and make decisions based on real evidence, not assumptions.

(5) Risk-Informed Development

Mr. Speaker, Sir, resilience is now mandatory. Every project, whether a footpath, a house, a road, or a jetty, must factor in hazard exposure and vulnerability to avoid future losses. This is how we protect our investments and safeguard our communities.

(6) Continuous Learning and Improvement

We are building a system that learns. That includes structured training for our

development officers, strengthening core capabilities and ensuring continuous monitoring, evaluation and reporting, so performance keeps improving year after year.

These six principles, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are the foundation of a modern Rural Development Model, one that is inclusive, evidence-based, resilient and truly community-centred.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on this philosophy of change, the review report outlines 10 strategic recommendations that will reposition Fiji's Rural Development System for the next decade:

- (1) Establishing a Clear Strategic Direction, Values and Engagement for the NRDP. This means, developing a unified strategic intent, a shared set of values and a robust engagement strategy to ensure coherence, complementarity and, most importantly, broad national ownership of the National Road Development Policy.
- (2) Harmonization and Decentralization
This recommendation calls for unifying the parallel administrative systems - the iTaukei Administration and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, to strengthen multi-ethnic participation and tailor governance systems to local realities. It also opens the door for decentralized decision-making and dedicated rural budgets, which may require new or amended legislation.
- (3) Full Provincial Alignment of the Rural Development System
We must finally move away from the outdated 'one-size-fits-all' model. Provinces are not the same, and development mechanisms much reflect that.
- (4) Coherence Across Rural, Municipal, National and Sectoral Planning Systems
This includes establishing an integrated planning coordination and implementation structure that links all levels of the system, from national and sectoral to provincial, municipal, district and community levels. Again, legislative amendments including the Finance Management Act 2004, may be necessary to operationalise this new system.
- (5) Integrating Traditional Leadership and Cultural Sensitivity
This means formally recognizing the *Bose Vanua* at the provincial level as an adjunct of the Great Council of Chiefs, as a critical component of a harmonised rural development system. This strengthens coordination and enhances multi-ethnic relations at the community level.
- (6) Community-Centric Development Approaches
Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must shift from simply meeting basic needs to addressing the root causes of vulnerability. This requires revising systems and tools across Government, civil society and the private sector, to support deeper, more integrated solutions.
- (7) Risk-Informed Development, Public Finance and Public Service Reforms
The report calls for embedding risk-informed development principles into planning legislation and making the intent of NRDP a formal deliverable in the performance contracts of Permanent Secretaries.
- (7) Strengthening the Evidence Base
This recommendation focusses on integrating rural development databases, such as the Ministry's National Rural Database and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs Village Profiles into a single platform to improve accuracy.

(9) Targeted Capability and Capacity Development

A comprehensive skills audit is recommended across the key agencies, followed by structured continuous training.

(10) Clarifying the Roles of Key Ministries Supporting Rural Development

This recommendation calls for revisiting the roles, structures and responsibilities of Ministries such as the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, and their strategic plans must be reshaped collectively to ensure alignment with the priorities of the NRDP.

I am pleased to inform this august House that Cabinet has deliberated on these 10 recommendations and has fully endorsed them at its last meeting on Tuesday, 28th October, 2025. This endorsement gives us the political mandate and policy direction necessary to begin the transformation of Fiji's rural development ecosystem, ensuring it is modern, coherent, inclusive and fit for purpose.

I have a few more points, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As part of this transformation process, the Ministry has set in motion the process of the formulation of the National Rural Development Policy. Last week, there was a capacity building programme convened for officers. There will be a series of consultations at national, divisional, provincial and community level, beginning next month through to February.

As, I had outlined earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's Change Management Programme is ushering a new era of rural development in Fiji.

² I will end there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and would like to table the full script of my response, if anyone wants to have a read of the details.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, you could that.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. How will the Ministry ensure that rural communities fully participate in shaping the new National Rural Development Policy, particularly those in remote and maritime areas?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted in my earlier presentation, the IRDF review and the Ministry of Exchange Management Programme, community voices must be central in any effective rural development framework. It will be developed through a comprehensive co-creation process that ensures everyone is involved.

Consultation teams will travel to all Divisions, Provinces, Districts and selected communities, including remote and maritime islands. The Ministry will work closely with provincial administrations, provincial councils, Roko Tui, District Officers, Turaga ni Koro, District Advisory Councils and community networks to mobilise participation.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an online survey will be made available to all our Fijians who cannot attend face-to-face consultations to contribute directly. Radio programmes, talkback shows and social media channels will also be used to reach rural and maritime population, and this multi-layered approach ensures that the voices of all Fijians, whether in the highlands, remote maritime zones or urban settlements, are heard and fully reflected in the NRDP.

² Editor's Note: Written Transcript of the response to Oral Question No. 299/2025, tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, is appended as **Schedule 2.**

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge honourable Members of this august House to encourage your community members and villagers in your Provinces to participate in this crucial process. This is an opportunity to share your development priorities, ideas and concerns, and tell us what is working, what is not, and what needs to change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- I thank the honourable Minister for his comprehensive answer but, mostly, it was generalised. Can the honourable Minister inform this august House how the review findings have directly improved service delivery, particularly in water, housing and rural accessibility for our rural and maritime communities?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, do you follow that?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I do not follow the specifics of the question. Could you repeat that?

MR. SPEAKER.- Be more specific, honourable Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had alluded to earlier, the honourable Minister has generalised everything. However, what I am asking specifically, can he inform this august House how the reviews findings have directly improved the service delivery, particularly in water, housing and rural accessibility for our rural and maritime communities. You have generalised it, honourable Minister, and people on the ground might not understand what you have said. Let us focus on these three important key issues.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the honourable Member is asking about the findings, we do not have the findings yet. We need to do the consultations and then the findings will come and then will relay it to the honourable Member.

Enforcement of Protection of Animals Act 1954
(Question No. 300/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications update Parliament on the enforcement of the Protection of Animals Act 1954?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. The Protection of Animals Act 1954 is actively enforced by the Fiji Police Force. Animal cruelty and injuring animals are criminal offences and are not treated as minor matters.

I am aware that this Act dates back to 1954 and the Coalition Government, this current Government, is committed to reviewing all the legislative laws. These are the old laws, to ensure it reflects contemporary standards and enforcement realities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for clarity, recorded cases of injuring animals from 2019 to 2020 were 69 cases. From 2021 to 2022, there were 79 cases. From 2023 to 2024, there were 44 cases, and early this year until last month, there were 14 cases, of which 10 were detected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these figures confirm that cases are being registered, investigated and acted upon. A recent example includes the Nabua incident involving the killing of a pet dog, where a suspect was identified and charged. I acknowledge public concern regarding perceived delays. However, the absence of an immediate arrest does not equate inaction by the Police. Police investigations must meet evidential and legal thresholds before charges can be laid.

I have raised some of these concerns directly with the Commissioner of Police, including the need to reinforce urgency, review outstanding reports and strengthen coordination with recognised animal welfare organisations. Mr. Speaker, Sir, animal cruelty will not be tolerated. Enforcement remains firm, lawful and ongoing. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I sincerely thank the honourable Minister for stating that he will look into amending the Act because currently, those who are guilty of this offence would be fined \$100 or jail time of not exceeding more than six months, so this needs to be looked into.

A supplementary question to the honourable Minister; with the cases that are reported, a few people who complained about this abuse against animals had difficulties with or expressed their disappointment on how some of the Police Officers handled the case. Is there any specialised training on animal welfare science, behavioural understanding and de-escalation techniques that can be coordinated or conducted for the Police Officers in the future?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, training is an ongoing thing for our police organisation, but in the specific areas that the honourable Member has mentioned, these are, perhaps, areas that need to be improved, and I can admit that as a former Commissioner of Police, we are talking about laws and the inactions by the Police in some cases and the inability to understand the various types of cases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while I have the opportunity, there is a greater demand here when we talk about animals. We need to have a bigger civic education on how we should treat and look after animals, whether they are pets or animals that are out in the farms, and that is something that needs to be done. Working together with other civil society organisations, like SPCA, is something that, perhaps, if the honourable Member is serious about this, he could divert some of his attention to that area and bring some of these issues up.

It is a serious matter, honourable Member, I understand that, and it is also a serious matter for the Coalition Government, and I think it is one of those legislation or laws that need to be brought up to date. Thank you, Sir.

Fiji-Solomon Islands Advance Justice Sector Collaboration
(Question No. 301/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General update Parliament on the Fiji and Solomon Islands Advance Justice Sector Collaboration?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to update this august House on the strength of collaboration between Fiji and the Solomon Islands in the advancement of our justice sector.

On 17th February this year, Fiji and Solomon Islands formalised a significant step in regional cooperation through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. Hosted at Level 1, Suvavou House, and endorsed by Cabinet, the MOU established a twinning programme designed to strengthen legal cooperation, capacity building and institutional development between our two nations. This MOU objectives include collaboration in legal aid, policy development, research, legislative drafting and legal practice. It paves the way for legal professionals from both countries to participate in reciprocal training, mentorship and professional placements.

These commitments were further advanced during our ministerial visit to the Solomon Islands from 12th to 18th of this month. Throughout the week, we held substantive discussions with Senior Justice Sector Leaders, including the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, the Permanent Secretary, the Attorney-General, the Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Public Solicitor and the Registrar-General. These engagements focussed on strengthening institutional linkages, identifying capacity building opportunities and exploring technical cooperation under the twinning programme.

A highlight of the visit was our engagement on the Justice Information Management System (JIMS), which honourable Koya had asked this morning - a comprehensive digital platform that has transformed case information management across the Solomon Islands court system. We received an extensive briefing from the JIMS developers, who demonstrated how this system integrates key justice institutions - the Police, ODPP, Legal Aid, Attorney-General's Chambers, Drafting Department, Judiciary and Corrections Service into a single coordinated digital ecosystem.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, JIMS provide a real time access to case records, remand and inmate data, electronic filing capabilities and consistent reference numbers across the entire justice chain, from arrest to discharge. Basically, if there is a bail application and the accused is asking for bail because there is not enough bed and the Prosecution is saying otherwise, the Magistrate, upon the press of a button, can confirm how many beds are available in prison. They have a system where all inmate details are logged in, their names, their date of entry into the corrections system, the date of their recharge, and what other pending matters they have in the Solomon Islands.

It is understood that the JIMS is the only system of its kind currently operational in the Pacific, placing the Solomon Islands at the forefront of the justice sector digitisation. These developers have expressed their willingness to assist Fiji by telling the system to support the Justice Sector Reform Roadmap 2025-2029. This partnership opens the door for digital transformation consistent with Fiji's reform priorities. At the DPP's Conference last week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which you had opened, there was a presentation on this programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MOU has already yielded a significant benefit across justice institutions. The OPP in Fiji and the ODPP in the Solomon Islands formalised a professional twinning partnership last week at the annual conference. Under the MOU, prosecutors will participate in a six-week reciprocal attachment, focussing on skills enhancement in legal research, case presentation, cybercrime, financial crimes, anti-corruption, money laundering, human trafficking and organized crime.

The Legal Aid Commission has also taken a leadership role. In April 2024, Legal Aid and Solomon Islands Public Solicitors signed a Virikawakawa Legal Network MOU, establishing a twinning programme covering legal practice, administration, finance, HR and IT. Under this arrangement, the Legal Aid Commission has deployed Principal Legal Officer, Patricia Mataika, on two different occasions, both over a month, to deliver extended continuing legal education in civil law practice in the Solomon Islands, and templates for civil law documents. Solomon Islands officers have completed attachment in Fiji, including both legal and administrative staff.

Notably, the Legal Aid Finance Manager, Mr. Abdul Rashid, delivered a four-day practical budget preparation training for the Solomon Islands Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, including the BOB, SOL, ODPP, Judiciary and Magistrate Officers.

Fiji stands to benefit significantly, particularly through the potential adoption of Justice Information Management System (JIMS) and continue strengthening of our regional standing and partnership.

On 8th May this year, the Fiji Law Reform Commission hosted the Solomon Islands Law Commission to sign an MOU, establishing a formal training programme focused on technical exchange, research capacity and knowledge sharing. This collaboration will enhance competencies in legal research, public consultation, stakeholder engagement, drawing from traditional Pacific knowledge systems and practises such as *talanoa* and community-based consultation.

This programme will commence in February 2026 with two officers from each institution undertaking a four-week attachment. This initiative is funded by the Australia-Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice Programme and will be led by one of our own, Mr. Apolosi Bose, the son of the late Mr. Isimeli Bose. The collaboration aligns with the Pacific Islands Forum 2025, a strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which emphasises regional co-operation, institutional strengthening, and collective security, areas in which law reform plays a critical enabling role.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this growing partnership between Fiji and the Solomon Islands reflects the shared commitment to addressing common challenges, including limited resources, geographic vulnerabilities, and the rise of transnational crime. It demonstrates the strength and value of regional solidarity, shared learning, and collective action. Our journey is strengthening justice systems. It is not for one nation alone. It is a Pacific responsibility, requiring unity, shared vision, and long-term commitment.

Fiji's partnership with the Solomon Islands is a testament to our belief in the power of regional cooperation. Through shared expertise, coordinated reform efforts, and collective capacity building, we are advancing a justice system that is more resilient, efficient, and responsive to the needs of our people. These collaborations strengthen not only our institutions, but also Pacific solidarity, our *vuvale* spirit, ensuring that justice, fairness, and the rule of law remain strong pillars of our nation. Fiji's law and justice sector is committed to deepening this partnership as we continue our journey to modernise Fiji's justice sector and contribute meaningfully to regional peace, prosperity and stability.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the detailed response to the question. Can the honourable Minister inform the House if the same justice sector collaboration concept is extended to other neighbouring Pacific Island countries?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one thing that is clear, we would like to start off with the Melanesian brothers first. There appears to be some commonalities before we actually move on to the Polynesians.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- You are being biased, Sir. Honourable Minister, within this collaboration, does the programme entail some of our judiciary magistrates going on an exchange programme to work there for a little while so they can broaden their horizons under this particular programme?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the next will be the Attorney-General. I had a good meeting with the Attorney-General, so we are anticipating the exchange of professional staff. In fact, for the AG's Conference, we are hosting some of our colleagues from Solomon Islands. The Chief Justice of Solomon Islands has already written to our Chief Justice. There will be a Chief Justice meeting in February next year, at the same time whilst we are having our Commonwealth Law Ministers' Meeting. There is a planned meeting between the heads of the judiciary of the Melanesian counties. Certainly, that is something on the table that our Chief Justice is yet to respond to his counterpart in the Solomon Islands. If I may say so, Sir Palmer sent his regards to you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, note that we have two Bills to deal with today. The first Bill will be for the Third Reading and the second Bill will be moved under Standing

Order 51.

We will now proceed to the first Bill and pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Tuesday, 25th November, 2025, the debate on this Bill will be limited to one hour.

TOWN PLANNING (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Tuesday, 25th November, 2025, I move:

That the Town Planning (Amendment) Bill 2025 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Town Planning Act that we seek to amend today was enacted in 1946, a time before Fiji's Independence, before the digital age and before the complex urban challenges we face today. This Bill is not a mere administrative tweak, it is a foundational reform that will modernise our approach to urban planning, strengthen oversight and improve investment facilitation. It replaces a paper-based peg system with a digital framework designed for clarity, transparency and speed.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will allow for the operationalisation of the Building Permit Approval System (BPAS). What this Bill will ultimately deliver is stronger governance that ensures decisions are informed, not only by technical expertise but also by clearer understanding of how development contributes to national resilience, community well-being and long-term economic stability.

The amendments empower planning authorities and local governments with a more structured process, enabling them to make decisions that are consistent, timely, and aligned with national development priorities. This will significantly improve how development applications are administered, ensuring the planning outcomes are predictable and that responsibilities between agencies are better defined.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill also responds to longstanding challenges associated with uneven development standards across different regions. By establishing a more uniformed process, it strengthens fairness and equity across all communities - urban, peri-urban and rural. Every Fijian, regardless of where they live, deserves well-planned neighbourhood, safe infrastructure and orderly growth. This amendment helps deliver that - extending application of the Town Planning Act to beyond town and city boundaries.

Furthermore, the strengthened planning framework gives confidence to both domestic as well as foreign investors. It ensures that decision-making processes are transparent, requirements are clear, and the pathway from application to approval is supported by stronger institutional checks. Investors often speak of uncertainty as one of the greatest barriers to engagement. This Bill directly responds to establishing a greater predictability in how development decisions are made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by modernising the planning system, we are also strengthening accountability. Clearer processes mean clearer responsibilities for all parties involved, their developers, consultants, local authorities, and technical agencies. This promotes a shared commitment to quality, sustainability and compliance. It reduces room for inconsistent practices and supports the governance, culture built on integrity and professionalism.

The amendment also enhances Government's long-term capacity to manage rapid urban expansion, shifting population patterns. Towns and cities are growing faster than ever before without a robust framework with risk developments that place unsustainable pressure on public services, transportation networks, and social infrastructure. This Bill positions Fiji to manage the growth intelligently, reducing future burdens on the State and preventing avoidable infrastructure failures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this reform is part of a broader effort to strengthen public administration across the country. It aligns with the whole of Government commitment to improve service delivery, meet international standards and support economic confidence. It is a forward-looking legislation that prepares Fiji for the next generation of development, ensuring the progress is orderly, well-managed and inclusive.

In closing, this Bill represents a major step towards a better governed, better planned and more resilient Fiji. It strengthens institutions, supports sustainable development and promotes an environment where communities and businesses can thrive with confidence. Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity and I support this Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me. Each one of the speakers is entitled to five minutes where the intervention including the response from the mover and they will be all contained in that one-hour capsule that I had indicated earlier.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to speak in support of the Town Planning (Amendment) Bill 2025, which represents a significant step in Government's efforts to modernise its approval frameworks and improve the overall cost of doing business or Ease of Doing Business in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard me talk in this House about how this Government has been the one that has brought back true democracy to Fiji. You will also hear me today talk about how this Government is also bringing back real Ease of Doing Business in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the significance of what is being discussed today, hopefully, will not pass without Fiji recognising what is happening. Since this Government came into power and working off some of the initiatives of the previous regime, we decided to continue to embark on the digitization of processes around Fiji. In that process, there were two specific processes approved for implementation, the:

- (1) starting a business process which is currently in-flight - a few teething problems but are being worked on; and
- (2) Bill which represents the Building Permit Approval System process, which is probably the most significant attempt by any government in this country to try and bring about Ease of Doing Business in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, very simply put, before this automation initiative came into place, the actual approval process for building permits was basically a manual approval process. You could have documentation as high as your own height or maybe I am exaggerating, but quite a large, sort of, batch of documents. These had to be handed around to every single agency that needed to approve the building permit, and the typical issues that would arise would be documents going missing, people going missing, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the amendment that is being proposed today will significantly change that. What is typically a two to three-year process, in some instances, and if done well, can potentially

reduce the times down to six months. If we can achieve that in the next few years, we will be able to speed up the level of economic activity in this country and, more particularly, you have heard me, now and again, talk about a \$6 billion pipeline. We can rapidly start getting approvals done faster in terms of that pipeline.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of, more specifically, the Town Planning (Amendment) Bill 2025, I think the most important significant issue to understand is that before automation, the whole town council environment had disparate systems for approval. What that will do is basically bring everyone on to one consistent approval and ensure that in years to come, whether you are in Lautoka, Suva, Nadi, Savusavu or Labasa, you will get the same approval process across.

The other important point is you will only have to enter your data once. Once you have entered your data, you do not need to enter it again. We can only recall with fondness or not so much fondness, we normally fill forms continuously in this country to get things done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few words, I wholeheartedly support this initiative and look forward to its successful implementation because of the transformative capabilities it will bring to Fiji.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on the Town Planning (Amendment) Bill 2025. At the outset, we support the principle of modernising our development approval processes, and as a former municipal administrator, I agree with the need for such a Bill. We have to move with time. We support digital adaptation, and we support reforms that will improve the service delivery to our people.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to humbly request the honourable Minister to revisit the provision for the manual system. A time will come when we get rid of this system, but as the honourable Minister had stated, that sometimes in December, he is going to launch this, and by February this will come into play. This is a humble request, if this can be considered.

The Bill moves Fiji towards a fully digital submission and approval system - that is the direction the world is moving towards, and we accept that. But we must not forget the reality in Fiji, and this is what I meant when I talked about the manual system. Mr. Speaker, Sir, many citizens, small contractors and rural communities lack digital literacy. Some regions still lack reliable connectivity, and therefore, I urge the Ministry to retain this manual submission pathway, at least during this transition period. We cannot leave behind people who simply cannot access digital system services.

Timeline, training and public awareness - the digital system is only as good as the people who use it. We request the honourable Minister to inform us on, what are the training plans for municipal staff, surveyors, engineers and the general public? What is the public awareness programme to ensure applicants understand how to use the new system; what are the realistic timelines for roll out testing, trouble shooting and full implementation?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am aware, when the final application is lodged, and when the application is rejected, there is an appeal provision whereby the applicant can appeal to the Minister. But in this, I stand to be corrected, but for this outline plan when submitted, I do not see any provision for the appeal. Requesting if the honourable Minister could look into this as well.

Powers of the Director - it seems to us that for the Director has wide powers, and this can be influenced for certain reasons. I do not want to be specific on the reasons, but it can be done. I would like to see if the honorable Minister can look into this as well.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is that this authority is spread out. It is also with the Ministry of Health, and I understand that all these will be merged, and I stand to be corrected. It is definitely going to help the people. The approach that the Ministry has taken and the way things are moving, we are in full support of this motion.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the passage of this Bill. I am happy to note the support from the other side of the House on this very important Bill before us. Honourable Kamikamica has outlined to us the reason why this legislation is very important, because investor confidence is something that is going to be key for us moving forward in a very globally competitive investor environment.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I would speak off the script but because of the time that we have been given, perhaps a little story. Many months ago, I think it would have been early 2024, I had the opportunity of speaking with the previous Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Pita Kewa Nacuva, who had dropped into my office to come and meet me and share with me some of the gems that they had. He thought that that would be helpful in the role that I played at the Ministry. I had shared this with some of my colleagues some months back. He challenged the Ministry of Lands in my office, saying to me, Mr. Speaker, that in his assessment, perhaps they did more things in their days than us today, and their days were without computers, laptops, phones, gadgets and without fancy boardrooms.

Of course, in those days, you either have to open the window of the boardrooms to get fresh air, or you have the fan coming off the ceiling, but they were able to pass subdivisions. They were able to get through developments. They were able to sign off on all documentations, one after the other - Director of Lands and Surveyor-General on to Registrar of Titles in record times, than what we presently experience today, and that is the challenge. What does our modern gadgets and the modernity of our operation needs to improve in our time to deliver the service that we know that the public of Fiji need of us?

The Bill that is before you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, attempts to do exactly that and I am sure for us inside the parameters of this House, we would all agree that this is something important, that we need to get to it because it is absolutely necessary for us to get investor confidence in the country.

Just looking at something on the screen of my computer, we were ranked 107 out of 190 countries under the World Bank Doing Business Ranking of 2020. That system or platform has now become obsolete. It is now replaced by Be Ready out of the World Bank, and as recently, they have only engaged 50 countries (Fiji is not part of it) to review how we do Ease of Doing Business.

However, Starting a Business in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 114th out of 190 countries; Dealing with Construction Permits, interestingly, 147th, that how we fare. Getting Electricity Approval - 80th out of 190th; Registering a Property - 85th; Getting Credit at a Bank - 70th; Protecting Minority Investors - 97th; Paying Taxes - 115th; and Trading Across Borders or Transnational Trading - 88th. We are not as bad as Papua New Guinea, which is ranked at 153rd, but we are not as great as New Zealand which is ranked number one in the world - we hover somewhere in the middle.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you ask me; “Are we able to improve on that?” I would say that with this Bill, we are able to attain that and together, on that side of the House and us, we all can make Fiji become a very good competitor in terms of investor confidence.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all the honourable Members who have spoken in full support of the Bill. I wish to respond to a few comments that were shared earlier by honourable Bala.

First, on whether there was awareness or training conducted to all council staff as well as consultants and those who will be the users of the Business Approval Permit Approval system, yes, the Ministry has already conducted the Users Acceptance Training. It was a 21-days training. I had also engaged all the council staff who will be part of the system, as well as consultants and agencies that will also be using the system.

As far as the appeals process is concerned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not part of the system. It is a separate system on its own and will be done manually.

To conclude, this Bill is a very significant one for our country because as we move to the future, we need to modernise our system, and this Bill is one way of operationalising some of the changes to modernise the way Ministries and Councils approve building permits in Fiji. So, it is good for our country, as we move forward to the future. I thank the honourable Members for supporting the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Town Planning Act 1946 enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No.of 2025)]

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now deal with the second and final Bill for today.

PERSONAL INSOLVENCY, FINANCIAL REHABILITATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL RESCUE BILL 2025

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (1) Personal Insolvency, Financial Rehabilitation and Entrepreneurial Rescue Bill 2025 (Bill No. 40/2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (2) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (3) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (4) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at the earliest possible date next year; and
- (5) Upon presentation, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to introduce the Personal Insolvency, Financial Rehabilitation and Entrepreneurial Rescue Bill 2025. As the title suggests, this piece of legislation is concerned with the area of personal insolvency, modern bankruptcy, good practices, and will not apply to insolvencies of companies. Owners and managers of distressed Micro, Small,

and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) will have a recourse to personal insolvency under the Bill, whether the business is unincorporated or operates as a partnership.

The Bill introduces a modern approach to personal insolvency, promoting the fresh start principle to help honest debtors return to economic productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of the Bill is to put in place flexible measures such as debt restructuring arrangement. Debt rehabilitation orders to support MSMEs in doing so, promote economic activity.

The Bill provides for the rehabilitation and rescue of MSMEs, sole proprietors, partnerships, and other unincorporated businesses in a number of areas by restructuring the debts of viable businesses and offering a second chance to entrepreneurs.

The Bill guarantees debt discharge for honest debtors who comply with the requirements of the insolvency procedure. This approach replaces the complex and uncertain system of conditional discharge under the Bankruptcy Act 1944.

Safeguards included in the Bill ensures that not only honest debtors benefit from the more flexible procedures for discharge, the Bill aims to reduce stigma and finality of financial failure for individuals who are prepared to act as honest debtors. In this way, the Bill aims to both stimulate economic growth, safeguard individuals and the wider community from future economic shocks and crisis, including public health emergencies such as experienced during COVID-19.

The Bill supports the stability of credit markets by adopting simplified and streamlined procedures to ensure efficient debt repayment in cases where that is possible. The Bill introduces insolvency measures that are alternative to formal bankruptcy, including:

- debt rehabilitation order - a simplified fast-track procedure for low-value cases;
- debt restructuring arrangement - a voluntary alternative allowing debtors and creditors to negotiate a plan for restructuring debts and partial repayment; and
- debt protection moratorium - a temporary 60-day stay on credit debt collection actions, allowing debtors time to seek advice and negotiate arrangements.

This legislation aims to encourage entrepreneurship in Fiji by supporting the rehabilitation and rescue of MSMEs, including sole proprietors, partnerships and other incorporated businesses, to unlock potential growth and renewal in the Fiji economy. I commend this Bill to the House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I thank the honourable Attorney-General for presenting this Bill and also that we will be going to the Committee to deliberate on. I think it is timely also. It probably does have a little bit of work before it actually comes back, but we do not have any problems with it at the moment, for it to go to the Committee to get it resolved. It is only helpful considering we spoke about MSMEs, et cetera, earlier on today. I have not had a good look at it, but just a cursory glance tells me that it is probably very timely. We have not got a problem with it, Sir.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, timely is what we have delivered here. This Bill has been around for some time. It has been polished, and it is a great encouragement for small businesses. I commend this Bill to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

(Personal Insolvency, Financial Rehabilitation and Entrepreneurial Rescue Bill 2025 (Bill No. 40/2025) referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, and the Committee to report on the Bill at the earlier possible date next year)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting. I thank you all for your contributions and your presence. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.22 p.m.

**Word Count: 2408 words**

P.S. The headings are provided for guidance only and are not intended to be read aloud as part of the speech.

Honourable Sitiveni L. Rabuka, CF, OBE(Mil), OStJ, MSD, Legion
D'Honneur (FR), Order of Tahiti Nui, MSc (Defence Studies) jssc, psc

Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Civil
Service and Public Enterprises

Ministerial Statement

'Strengthening Fiji's Global Partnership'

Parliament of Fiji
Government Buildings, Suva

Thursday 27 November 2025
0930 Hours

Opening Remarks

- 1.0 Mister Speaker Sir,
Honourable Deputy Prime Ministers,
Honourable Leader of Opposition,
Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen.
- 2.0 Ni sa Bula Vina'a and a very good morning to you all.
- 3.0 I extend my greetings as well to all those joining us via
livestream and through other media platforms.

Introduction

4.0 I rise today to update this August House on my recent Official Visit to Japan earlier this month, and to report on the continuing work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in strengthening Fiji's global partnerships and our connection with Fijians living abroad.

5.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Government of Japan for the remarkable contributions it has provided Fiji over the years since we established relations 55 years ago.

6.0 Both countries, **Mister Speaker Sir**, share a long-standing friendship, built on mutual respect, shared democratic values, and cooperation. We are also important partners in maintaining the rule-based international order based on the primacy of the rule of law.

7.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, the Fiji – Japan relations have resulted in cooperation that has progressed across a wide range of areas, including infrastructure, education, health and medical care, disaster prevention, security, justice, sports exchanges and most recently human mobility.

8.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, it has been my intention to further deepen our ties with Japan and was honoured to accept the gracious invitation extended by Japan to make this official visit from 12 to 15 November 2025.

Fiji- Japan Prime Ministers' Summit

9.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, the highlight of my official visit was the bilateral engagement that occurred during the Prime Ministers' Summit on 13 November 2025. On this occasion, I had the distinct honour of meeting the newly elected and first female Prime Minister of Japan, Her Excellency Ms. Takaichi Sanae.

10.0 The meeting proved to be highly beneficial, as both parties participated in thorough discussions aimed at fostering bilateral cooperation. Among the key topics discussed were disaster risk resilience program, ~~the~~ enhancing economic relations, and the importance of maritime security.

11.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, I ^{want}~~would like~~ to emphasise that bilateral cooperation greatly assists in the preservation of national and regional peace and stability.

12.0 I wish, therefore, **Mister Speaker Sir**, to acknowledge the profound contributions of the Government of Japan, and in this respect, by designating Fiji as its inaugural recipient of Official Security Assistance.

13.0 Prime Minister Takaichi^{*Sanae*} expressed her deep appreciation to Fiji for the trust in Japan's efforts regarding the discharge of Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) treated water into the sea. Prime Minister Sanae reassured that Japan's ~~response~~^{*actions*} will continue to be transparent and accountable, one that is based on scientific evidence to enhance confidence in safety.

14.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, this bilateral meeting provided an opportunity for both countries to address pertinent regional issues. Japan expressed its strong support for regional unity and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) "2050 Strategy," which exemplifies this commitment.

15.0 Additionally, Japan reaffirmed its dedication to fulfilling the commitments made at the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) held last year, which includes a financial contribution of \$3 million USD to the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF). Furthermore, Japan reaffirmed its support in preparation for PALM11, scheduled to take place in 2027.

16.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, recognising that climate change is an existential threat in the Pacific, Japan acknowledges the importance of having Pacific Island Countries represented in platforms like the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change.

17.0 The bilateral meeting culminated in the signing of the “Lomavata Kizuna Partnership”, a Joint Communique that reaffirmed the bilateral relations of Fiji and Japan. The Communique aims to further enhance cooperation across security, economic development, climate resilience, and cultural exchange.

Meeting with the Japan Minister of Defence

18.0 Mister Speaker Sir, I had the privilege of participating in discussions with the Japan Defence Minister, His Excellency Mr. Shinjiro Koizumi, on 12th November at the Ministry of Defence headquarters. Our conversations were centred on enhancing maritime resilience and exploring avenues for humanitarian assistance.

19.0 Minister Koizumi emphasised that Fiji is an important partner for Japan, as both nations share core values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. He also highlighted Fiji's important role as one of the few countries in the Pacific region that maintains its own military.

20.0 Mister Speaker Sir, discussions focused on strategies to combat transnational organised crimes that have severely impacted our security resources in the maritime space.

21.0 Minister Koizumi presented information on the assistance that Japan can provide through its decommissioned naval vessels, which could significantly enhance our capacity to monitor activities that pose a threat to Fiji's maritime domain.

22.0 Fiji showed its appreciation to Japan's ongoing support towards enhancing maritime resilience and humanitarian assistance across the Pacific, ~~and~~ contributions in human resource development and technical cooperation through its development agency, JICA.

also
23.0 ~~Also~~, Fiji [^]notes Japan's support in the Pacific's maritime and vocational sectors. Fiji remains committed to this collaboration through its recently opened Maritime Essential Services Centre in Lami.

24.0 Mister Speaker Sir, I highlighted that the support and partnership directly contributed to the implementation of the Ocean of Peace Declaration, in tandem with the other Pacific Island Forum's initiatives of the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which reinforces the Pacific's collective commitment to peace, security and development.

25.0 Minister Koizumi paid tribute to Fiji's leadership in the Pacific, and pledged Japan's commitment to continuing defence cooperation between the two countries.

prior to our meeting

26.0 Minister Koizumi reflected that a week ~~back~~, Fiji's navy participated in the first ever joint exercise with the Japanese Navy, and he looks forward to the 2nd Japan-Pacific Defence Dialogue in February next year.

Meeting with the Japan Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism

27.0 Mister Speaker Sir, my last bilateral meeting was with the Minister of Lands, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, His Excellency Mr. Yasushi Kaneko. Discussions in this meeting included the mega port construction and reviving the ship building industry in Fiji.

28.0 The bilateral discussions also focused on strengthening capacity building initiatives and enhancing support for Fiji's maritime security capabilities through collaborations with partners such as the Japan Coast Guard. These engagements aim to improve our capabilities in search and rescue operations and advance other critical maritime security priorities.

Memorandum of Cooperation on the Technical Intern Training Program

29.0 Mister Speaker Sir, this visit also provided the Government of Fiji with a valuable opportunity to advance cooperation in human resource development and strengthen capacity building initiatives.

30.0 At the margins of the visit, the Permanent Secretary for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations, Mr. Jone Maritino Nemani, and the Commissioner of the Immigration Services Agency of Japan, Mr. Hideharu Maruyama, executed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) on the Technical Intern Training Program.

31.0 Mister Speaker Sir, the MOC aims to ^{facilitate the} transfer advanced technical skills and knowledge from Japan to Fiji, creating structured pathways for Fijian workers to gain practical experience at international standards. In so doing they are ingrained into the deep Japanese traditional culture at the workplace in what is globally recognised as the Japanese work ethic. This is a lesson that can inform Fijian efforts in incorporating our values into our very own work culture.

32.0 The MOC initiative addresses critical labour market needs for both countries while deepening bilateral ties through cultural and people-to-people exchanges, fostering mutual economic resilience and partnerships.

33.0 *Mister Speaker* Sir, the MOC establishes a structured framework that integrates labour mobility with capacity building, reflecting a commitment to workforce development by both governments.

34.0 The MOC addresses Fiji's challenges such as brain drain and underemployment while providing Japan with a mechanism to meet labour shortages, creating a mutually beneficial partnership that reinforces economic resilience while deepening bilateral ties.

35.0 *Mr. Speaker* Sir, the MOC stands as a strategic framework that aligns Fiji's workforce aspirations with Japan's economic imperatives. The MOC sets the stage for sustainable human resource development and shared prosperity.

Engagement with our Diaspora

36.0 Mister Speaker Sir, I also had the opportunity to meet and engage with our Fijian diaspora in Tokyo.

37.0 It is encouraging to see our people progressing and making significant contributions outside of Fiji. Their commitment to their families and homeland continues to play an important role in supporting Fiji's economy and promoting the nation's values abroad.

38.0 Mister Speaker Sir, once again I take this opportunity to commend the Fijian diaspora for their valuable contributions to Fiji's development through their remittances, skills, community initiatives and being outstanding ambassadors.

Site Visits

39.0 Mister Speaker Sir, in addition to the bilateral meetings that were held, our Japanese counterparts facilitated site visits to key institutions. These included the National Agricultural Food Research Organization, Yokohama Port, the Keihin Koyasu Shipyard and the Narita Airport. These visits

provided valuable insights and lessons that hold significant relevance for the context of Fiji.

National Agricultural Food Research Organization (NARO)

40.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, the visit to the National Agricultural Food Research Organization (NARO) started with a tour of the facility. NARO serves as Japan's largest leading research institution dedicated to agricultural and food sciences with 3,300 employees and 1,700 researchers.

41.0 Operating under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, it conducts cutting-edge research in areas such as crop improvement, livestock development, soil health, and climate-resilient farming.

42.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, through its work, NARO helps enhance productivity and efficiency in Japan's agricultural sector, which is critical for a country with limited arable land and a ~~rapidly~~ aging farming population.

43.0 Beyond productivity, NARO is instrumental in safeguarding Japan's food supply and environmental sustainability. It

develops technologies to reduce pesticide use, improve water management, and adapt crops to changing climate conditions.

44.0 **Mister Speaker Sir,** Fiji can learn a lot to enhance its agriculture sector by adopting relevant strategies from Japan through NARO. These would include strengthening farmer cooperatives for shared resources and market access, investing in climate-resilient technologies like drought-tolerant crops and precision irrigation, and strengthening the agricultural research hub to drive innovation such as the one we have in Koronivia.

45.0 These approaches if adopted in a suitable scale can help Fiji improve productivity, adapt to climate challenges, and build a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural economy. This would greatly contribute to food security and sustainable farming techniques in the region.

Yokohama Port

46.0 **Mister Speaker Sir,** I also visited the Yokohama Port, which accommodates numerous cruise and cargo ships, making it a gateway for both commercial and passenger traffic. It boasts

over 90 regular international container shipping routes, connecting Japan to global markets.

47.0 It is directly linked to the Tokyo metropolitan area via expressways, enhancing its role as a comprehensive logistics centre. It is leading Japan's green maritime transformation through its Carbon-Neutral Port (CNP) initiative, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050.

48.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, Fiji stands to benefit significantly from the practices observed at Yokohama Port through strategic investments in resilient and efficient maritime infrastructure capable of withstanding natural disasters while facilitating high-volume trade.

49.0 The earthquake-resistant design and sophisticated logistics systems employed by Yokohama provide a valuable framework for Fiji, which endures frequent cyclones and is agile in the face of rising sea level.

50.0 By adopting similar engineering standards and technologies, Fiji can ensure continuity of port operations during extreme

weather events and improve its capacity to handle international cargo and cruise traffic.

Keihin Koyasu Shipyard

51.0 Mister Speaker Sir, I visited the Keihin Koyasu Shipyard, which specialises in the construction and repair of small vessels. Although the shipyard primarily focuses on small vessel projects, its collaboration with Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha (NYK Line) enables it to contribute to Japan's broader maritime research objectives.

52.0 These objectives include the exploration of next-generation fuels and the integration of green technologies into shipbuilding practices.

53.0 Mister Speaker Sir, by learning from Keihin Koyasu's applied research and collaborating with Japanese partners, Fiji can accelerate the adoption of green maritime technologies, reduce its carbon footprint, and enhance the resilience of its shipping infrastructure.

54.0 This not only supports environmental goals but also strengthens economic and logistical independence for island communities.

Narita International Airport Tour

55.0 Mister Speaker Sir, during my recent site visit to Narita Airport, I was given a tour by senior executives of the Narita International Cooperation. The model they employ consists of three phases: Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in the airport sector, Airport Operations and Facility Enhancement, and Aviation Professional Development.

56.0 I had the honour of meeting fellow Fijians working at Narita Airport under Japan's foreign skilled worker program. These Fijians shared their experiences of how the Japanese work culture has developed their work ethics, enhancing key aspects such as time management, respect, diligence, and honesty.

57.0 Mister Speaker Sir, Japan's labour shortage, especially in sectors like aviation, agriculture, and caregiving, has opened doors for Fijians to work under structured programs that

offer training, fair wages, and cultural exchange. These programs not only provide Fijians with valuable international experience and earnings, it also allows them to bring back advanced skills that can contribute to Fiji's national development.

Key Takeaways

58.0 Mister Speaker Sir, my official visit to Japan was an enlightening experience. I was impressed not only by the country's economic and developmental advancements but also its deep respect for culture and its commitment to research and development, which play a significant role in enhancing its development discourse.

59.0 Japanese culture offers valuable principles that enhance modern work environments, particularly through its emphasis on discipline, respect, and continuous improvement. Our people can learn from the Japanese work culture by embracing these values to enhance both individual performance and organisational success.

Research and Development

60.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, Japan places strong emphasis on Research and Development, investing heavily in innovation to drive economic growth, technological leadership, and societal resilience, offering valuable lessons for countries like Fiji.

61.0 Fiji can learn from Japan by prioritising Research and Development in national planning, even on a smaller scale, and by building partnerships with international research institutions.

62.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, establishing dedicated research hubs, encouraging innovation in climate resilience, agriculture, and renewable energy, and investing in STEM education can help Fiji develop homegrown solutions to local challenges.

Conclusion

63.0 **Mister Speaker Sir**, we will continue to deepen and reaffirm our deep and long-standing relations with Japan.

64.0 This Official Visit renewed commitments, further strengthening our cooperation across key areas of mutual interest including climate resilience, economic development, technology, and people-to-people ties.

65.0 Mister Speaker Sir, I wish to also inform this honourable house that the External Trade has now been transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the staff now stationed there.

Vina'a va'alevu, Mister Speaker Sir.



Hon. Sakiasi Ditoka

**Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and
Disaster Management**

Response to Oral Question 299/2025

– Thursday 27 November 2025

299/2025 Hon. Alipate Tuicolo to ask the Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management – **Can the Minister update Parliament on the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) 2009 Review Report.**

SALUTATION

The Honourable Speaker;

The Honourable Prime Minister;

Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers;

The Honourable Leader of Opposition; and

Honourable Members of Parliament.

INTRODUCTION

1. **Mr. Speaker Sir,** I thank the Hon. Member for this question.
2. **Mr. Speaker Sir,** you may recall that earlier in this financial year I had provided some insight on the background of the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) 2009 when I had to respond to a similar question on this very subject.
3. I am appreciative of this opportunity to provide an update on the review of the IRDF which I had mentioned then.
4. **Mr. Speaker Sir,** at the outset, I would like to acknowledge the support of the various Ministries involved in the IRDF review process.
5. Secondly, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the support of the United Nations Development Programme, under its Governance for Resilient Development in the Pacific Programme (Gov4Res).

REVIEW OF THE INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

6. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, the IRDF has been the guiding document for the Ministry's service delivery to the rural people since its approval in 2009. It was intended to be a national framework designed to bridge the gap between **bottom-up community planning** and **top-down national decision-making**.
7. However, it has been a challenge to the Ministry when the Constitution was approved in 2013 as the Ministry would have to manoeuvre its operations within the supreme legal framework of the country.
8. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, it was crucial for the review to be undertaken, a significant work that I am really proud to have progressed with, since the Coalition Government came into office.

9. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, I would like to also note that the review represents the first deliverable under the Ministry's **Change Management Programme (CMP)**. The CMP is an institutional reform initiative aimed at modernising the planning, coordination, and implementation of development across Fiji's rural and maritime communities.
10. The completion of this review marks a significant milestone for the Coalition Government. In view of the evolving development landscape, it is essential that the Ministry operates under a **clear, modern, and coherent framework** that will guide its future direction towards fulfilling Government's vision for resilient and inclusive rural communities.
11. After fifteen years of implementation, the review was timely to assess the Framework's relevance, achievements, and challenges, and to determine how rural development can now be repositioned for the next decade under a new **National Rural Development Policy (NRDP)**.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

12. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, the review, conducted over seven months, employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including document analysis, stakeholder workshops, interviews, 'talanoa' sessions, online surveys, and validation exercises with key external partners and Ministry Senior Management.
13. While the IRDF 2009 was instrumental in its time, its long-term impact was severely limited by systemic issues. The review highlighted some key challenges such as:
- (i) **Incomplete Decentralised Planning.** The goal of 'bottom-up' planning was undermined by unfinished Divisional Development Plans. This indicates that the decentralised system for translating community priorities into actionable, funded projects was never fully operationalised or sustained.

(ii) **Poor Vertical and Horizontal Coordination.** The major challenge was a failure to achieve true "integration."

- ✓ **Horizontal Integration:** Poor coordination among various government agencies and development partners led to fragmented efforts and duplication, diluting the overall impact.
- ✓ **Vertical Integration:** Inconsistencies between community priorities and 'top-down' national policies meant a disconnect in funding and strategic priorities.

(iii) **Limited Funding and Inefficiencies.** Inadequate funding allocations coupled with systemic inefficiencies in resource management collectively impeded the framework's goals. This points to a failure in mainstreaming rural development funding effectively across the national budget.

14. **Mr. Speaker Sir,** the findings revealed a strategic opportunity for the forthcoming NRDP to address systemic challenges and reimagine Fiji's rural development architecture. This will require:

- (i) strengthened inter-agency coordination;
- (ii) participatory and inclusive governance;
- (iii) integration of traditional leadership structures;
- (iv) improved resource allocation; and
- (v) mainstreaming of climate resilience and sustainability.

15. The review's central contribution lies in articulating a ***philosophy of change*** and a set of actionable recommendations to drive reforms through the NRDP.

PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE

16. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, please allow me to talk very briefly about the six core reform principles of this philosophy of change that have been identified from the Review of the IRDF. These principles will guide the Ministry's transformation process, ensuring that future rural development is inclusive, risk-informed, and resilient.

17. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, the six core principles we are now applying are designed to break away from the old, siloed, top-down way of doing things. We are shifting from simply **delivering projects** to **building resilient and empowered rural economies and societies**. Allow me to briefly outline these principles.
18. **First, Rural Development is Everyone's Business.** **Mr. Speaker Sir**, rural development cannot sit only with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. It must be a national agenda, driven by the Ministry of Finance, the Public Service Commission, line ministries, the private sector, civil society, and development partners. Only then can we mobilise resources at scale and deliver real transformation.
19. **Second, Different Solutions for Different Contexts.** We are moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, development in a maritime province is not the same as development in Naitasiri or Ba. Each area has its own realities, and our approach must reflect those differences. This also means strengthening the link between rural and urban areas, especially as issues like drugs and rural-urban migration cross those boundaries.

20. **Third, People First, Community First.**

This principle shifts our focus from just meeting basic needs to addressing root causes. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, we are re-imagining development around community aspirations, empowerment, economic participation, leadership development, and not just delivering infrastructure.

21. **Fourth, Evidence-based and Integrated Solutions.**

We are integrating rural development databases into one unified platform to reduce duplication, improve data integrity, and make decisions based on real evidence—not assumptions.

22. **Fifth, Risk-informed Development.**

Mr. Speaker Sir, resilience is now mandatory. Every project, whether a footpath, a house, a road, or a jetty, must factor in hazard exposure and vulnerability to avoid future losses. This is how we protect our investments and safeguard communities.

23. And Sixth, Continuous Learning and Improvement.

We are building a system that learns. This includes structured training for our development officers, strengthening core capabilities, and ensuring continuous monitoring, evaluation, and reporting so performance keeps improving year after year.

24. Mr. Speaker Sir, these six principles are the foundation of a modern rural development model, one that is inclusive, evidence-based, resilient, and truly community-centred.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW REPORT
(ACTION PLAN)**

25. Mr. Speaker Sir, building on this philosophy of change, the Review Report outlines **ten strategic recommendations** that will reposition Fiji's rural development system for the next decade.

26. First, **Establishing a Clear Strategic Direction, Values, and Engagement for the NRDP.**

This means developing a unified strategic intent, a shared set of values, and a robust engagement strategy to ensure coherence, complementarity, and most importantly, broad national ownership of the National Rural Development Policy.

27. Second, **Harmonisation and Decentralisation.**

This recommendation calls for unifying the parallel administrative systems, the iTaukei Administration and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, to strengthen multi-ethnic participation and tailor governance systems to local realities. It also opens the door for decentralised decision-making and dedicated rural budgets, which may require new or amended legislation.

28. Third, **Full Provincial Alignment of the Rural Development System.**

We must finally move away from the outdated 'one-size-fits-all' model. Provinces are not the same, and development mechanisms must reflect that. The report recommends a pilot approach to re-imagine how divisional structures can support a fully province-based and equitable system aligned with traditional leadership.

29. Fourth, **Coherence across Rural, Municipal, National and Sectoral Planning Systems.**

This includes establishing an integrated planning, coordination, and implementation structure that links all levels of the system, from national and sectoral to provincial, municipal, district, and community levels. Legislative amendments, including to the Finance Management Act 2004, may be necessary to operationalise this new system.

30. Fifth, **Integrating Traditional Leadership and Cultural Sensitivity.**

This means formally recognising the Bose Vanua at the provincial level, as an adjunct of the Great Council of Chiefs, as a critical component of a harmonised rural development system. This strengthens coordination and enhances multi-ethnic relations at the community level.

31. Sixth, **Community-centric Development Approaches.**

Mr. Speaker Sir, we must shift from simply meeting basic needs to addressing the root causes of vulnerability. This requires revising systems and tools across Government, civil society, and the private sector to support deeper, more integrated solutions.

32. Seventh, **Risk-informed Development, Public Finance, and Public Service Reforms.**

The report calls for embedding risk-informed development principles into planning legislation and making the intent of the NRDP a formal deliverable in the performance contracts of Permanent Secretaries.

33. Eighth, **Strengthening the Evidence Base.**

This recommendation focuses on integrating rural development data systems, such as MRMDDM's National Rural Database and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs' Village Profiles, into a single national platform to improve accuracy, eliminate duplication, and support smarter decision-making.

34. Ninth, **Targeted Capability and Capacity Development.**

A comprehensive skills audit is recommended across the key agencies, followed by structured, continuous training programmes for officials and community stakeholders at all levels.

35. Tenth, **Clarifying the Roles of Key Ministries Supporting Rural Development.**

This recommendation calls for revisiting the roles, structures, and responsibilities of ministries such as MRMDDM, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, and the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs. Their strategic plans must be reshaped collectively to ensure alignment with the priorities of the NRDP.

36. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, I am pleased to inform this august House that Cabinet has deliberated on these ten recommendations and has fully endorsed them at its last meeting on Tuesday, 28 October 2025.
37. This endorsement gives us the political mandate and policy direction necessary to begin the transformation of Fiji's rural development ecosystem, ensuring it is modern, coherent, inclusive, and fit for purpose.

NEXT STEPS

38. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, as part of this transformation process, the Ministry has set in motion the process of the formulation of the NRDP – the National Rural Development Policy.
39. Last week, there was a capacity building program convened for our officers to prepare them for the co-creation process, which is the methodology being adopted for the NRDP formulation. This is being built upon the inclusive lessons from the IRDF Review.

40. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, there will be a series of consultations at national, divisional, provincial and community level beginning next month through to February. All these will culminate in the formulation of the NRDP which we are hoping to complete for Cabinet's consideration by June 2026.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

41. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, as I outlined earlier, the Ministry's Change Management Programme is ushering in a new era of rural development in Fiji. The Review of the Integrated Rural Development Framework 2009 is a central pillar of this transformation, moving us away from fragmented, outdated, and siloed practices of the past and towards a modern, coordinated, and community-centred system that truly empowers our rural and maritime people.
42. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, genuine transformation takes commitment and discipline. For too long, rural development was limited by slow processes, one-size-fits-all policies, and weak coordination. This Government has chosen a different path, one that is decentralised, transparent, and anchored in local leadership and data-driven planning. These reforms will

strengthen resilience, reduce rural poverty, and close the long-standing development gap between urban and rural Fiji.

43. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, the Review makes one thing very clear: this Government is not here to maintain the status quo. We are here to deliver structural reform, reform that gives every province and every community a fair chance to thrive. That is the hallmark of a Government that transforms, not merely administers.

44. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, I thank you for the opportunity to update this Honourable House. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that no Fijian, whether in our cities, highlands, or the most remote outer islands, is left behind. The journey continues, and we will deliver a stronger, fairer, and more connected Fiji for all.

Thank You

