

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**WEDNESDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2025**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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## **WEDNESDAY, 26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2025**

The Parliament met at 9.41 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 iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts; and the honourable P.D. Kumar.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> 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. *Sa malo a bula, nu lea mata vinaka mai.* I also welcome all of those joining us in the public gallery, and to everyone watching the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for staying connected and engaged in our parliamentary proceedings.

#### Visitors in the Public Gallery

Honourable Members, please, join me in warmly welcoming the students, teachers and parents from Shantiniketan Pathshala School in Naitasiri.

Please, also join me in welcoming the Bua athletics team from the primary schools in the District of Kubulau, Nadi, Solevu and Vuya, who, I believe, are here to participate in the Tuckers Athletics Competition which will be held at the National Stadium from tomorrow.

I warmly welcome you all to this Parliament and I hope your visit will deepen your appreciation of the working of your Parliament and offer an insight in the role that Parliament plays in shaping and safeguarding your democracy.

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development;
- (2) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry; and
- (3) Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport.

Ease of Doing Business - Digital Transformation and Regulatory Reform

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to update this august House on the Government's ongoing efforts to improve the Ease of Doing Business in Fiji, an agenda that is fundamental to accelerating investment, driving growth, creating jobs and modernising the way government serves our businesses and citizens.

Today's statement highlights not only the major reforms that are already transforming our business landscape, but also deliberate systems, coordination and institutional changes that have made those reforms work. Importantly, I will outline the next phase of reforms, including our engagement with International Finance Corporation (IFC) in delivering the B-Ready Assessment and the establishment of pillar-based working groups to ensure Fiji moves decisively and simultaneously across every area that matters to investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, improving the Ease of Doing Business is not merely about being competitive in global rankings. It is about giving our people the opportunity to participate in economic activity without having to navigate unnecessary barriers. It is about giving entrepreneurs confidence that their government is a partner in their success and not an obstacle. It is about ensuring development happens faster, fairer and more transparently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the centre of our reforms is BusinessNOW Fiji, the Government's flagship Ease of Doing Business programme, built on the Fiji Integrated Licences and Permits Approval System (FILPAS). The BusinessNOW Fiji connects multiple government agencies into one digital ecosystem so that businesses and investors can deal with the government through a single, modern, and transparent interface.

The Whole-of Government platform is a key commitment in our National Development Plan and digitalFIJI initiative. It moves Fiji away from fragmented, paper-based processes towards a unified, "one-country, one-system" model for business services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Starting a Business Subsystem (SABS) is the first major digital reform under BusinessNOW Fiji and has modernised business registrations in Fiji. Previously, entrepreneurs faced a lengthy, multi-step, manual process involving multiple offices. It was slow, inconvenient and costly. SABS now connects eight government agencies on one digital platform, removing duplication and enabling seamless information sharing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the results are clear - faster processing, fewer errors, and improved customer satisfaction. SABS also provides transparent, measurable performance through service level agreements and real-time data that pin-points delays. These capabilities were not possible under the old paper system. Most importantly, SABS has facilitated and expanded access. Entrepreneurs across Fiji, including rural and maritime communities can now register a business online without travel or extra costs. Since the launch, SABS has received over 60,600 e-service applications, with more than 16,000 successfully processed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second cornerstone of our Ease of Doing Businesses is the Building Permits Approval System (BPAS). This is one of Government's most complex reforms, as construction approvals involve many agencies, councils, inspectors, utilities, regulators and professionals. Currently, construction permits in Fiji take 160 to 170 days on average, creating a

major barrier to investment and economic activity. BPAS will introduce a unified end-to-end online system with real-time tracking, digital plan submissions, simultaneous reviews, and clear service timeline for every agency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the demand for building approvals continues to rise. As noted earlier, from January to November, the Ministry of Local Government received over 2,186 building permit applications nationwide, representing \$1.16 billion in planned projects. So, this is a significant volume of development covering homes, offices, factories and hotels. Importantly, about 25 percent of these applications were from commercial, industrial, and tourism projects, which are essential to economic diversification and post-pandemic recovery.

It is important to highlight that crucial regulatory reforms have been undertaken to advance this digital transformation. Some of the significant reforms are:

- (1) Standardised inspection fees based on building size;
- (2) Permit fees based on development size, not project value;
- (3) Mandatory qualified persons' endorsements, ensuring that architectural and engineering plans submitted to councils meet technical standards before review;
- (4) Legal acceptance of electronic signatures, digital plans, and system-generated certificates; and the other advantage is the
- (5) Unified forms and standard operating procedures across all municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those reforms in place, our target is clear - reducing approval times to under 100 days, and for straightforward applications, significantly less. The success of SABS and BPAS was intentional. It came from strong coordination, discipline, and ownership across the civil service. The key enablers were:

- (1) a results-driven project team;
- (2) strong interagency co-ordination;
- (3) technical working groups;
- (4) changed champions within; and
- (5) nationwide capacity-building as well have been undertaken.

So, these mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are now recognised as some of Government's most effective coordination structures and will support the next phase of the Ease of Doing Business reforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's reform agenda goes beyond SABS and BPAS. There is an impending B-ready Assessment, and the World Bank's new global benchmarking tool will be put into place to replace the Doing Business Index. It reveals key areas such as business entry, construction permits, tax administration, trade, labour regulations and utility connections. Sir, the IFC is our technical partner, helping ensure Fiji's reforms align with global best practice and are implemented with rigour and credibility.

We also have the Investment Facilitation Committee, a Cabinet-mandated ministerial-level body that identifies bottlenecks in Fiji's investment climate and recommends solutions. We intend for this Committee to oversee the B-Ready Working Groups to ensure technical efforts are supported by strong political leadership and clear direction. This approach unites all agencies under one co-ordinated agenda, speeds up decision-making, and assures investors that reforms are driven at the highest level of Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Working Groups for the B-Ready pillars are intended to be created under the Committee, allowing Fiji to progress across all areas simultaneously rather than sequentially. This ensures balance and faster reform. These groups will include key ministries and agencies, supported by IFC specialists. They will be tasked to identify gaps, propose solutions, simplify regulations, and prepare an action plan to position Fiji favourably and progressively. We recognise the work ahead. The B-Ready Assessment will provide a clear five-year reform roadmap, and the Government is committed to acting decisively on its findings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these reforms are not simply administrative improvements. They have real and measurable impacts on our citizens and economy. These are not abstract benefits; they make a practical difference to the everyday lives of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we move forward, we recognise that Fiji must benchmark itself against global leaders. Countries like Singapore, Estonia, Mauritius, and New Zealand have shown that good regulatory design, clear timelines and digital systems can dramatically accelerate economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with BPAS and SABS and the broader BusinessNOW Fiji programme, Fiji is already punching above its weight. It is important to acknowledge that some larger economies do not have integrated systems like ours. With the right policy discipline, we can position Fiji as a leader in the Pacific for digital government and investment facilitation.

With all this information, effort and foresight now before us, it is clear that our reforms cannot remain merely aspirational; they must be embedded into the day-to-day priorities of our ministries and agencies. If Fiji is to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with global leaders, we must ensure that these systems, timelines and reforms are not treated as side projects but as core components of our ministries and agencies.

In light of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight several key recommendations for the government's continuous reform work:

- (1) Integrate Service Level Agreements (SLAs) into Permanent Secretary KPIs  
This is to ensure accountability, including SLAs on our digital systems, driving consistent agency performance and reinforcing a culture of timely service delivery.
- (2) Make all future legislative amendments digital by default  
New laws, regulations and policy frameworks should be designed with digital processes in mind from the outset. This ensures modern service delivery, reduce recurrent amendments and allows faster digital transitions.
- (3) Expand Inter-Agency Data Sharing  
Businesses should not have to submit the same information to multiple agencies. Strengthening data sharing will speed up approvals, reduce errors and simplify compliance obligations. We, as the Government, should work towards a vision of “once-only” principle.
- (4) Embed Digital-Ready Processes  
Agencies should redesign manual processes so they are streamlined and digital-ready, regardless of when they will be digitalized. Designing with digitalization in mind makes future transition faster, cheaper and smoother. A digital-ready mindset also ensures that even while some services remain manual, businesses experience more efficient, predictable and transparent interactions with Government.

(5) Promote Mutual Recognition with Safeguards

Agencies should avoid duplication checks for information already verified by a competent authority. Government processes must be collaborative. MOUs, data sharing agreements and accountability frameworks should be used to build trust and reduce repetition. This should, however, be applied with appropriate caution and risk assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir we all acknowledge that much more could be done. The progress we have made in improving Fiji's Ease of Doing Business is a testament to what can be achieved when the Government works together with purpose and discipline. SABS and BPAS are not just ICT projects, they are symbols of a new way of working - one that values transparency, speed, fairness and service excellence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call on honourable Members to support the enabling laws and resources required for the next phase of reforms. I call on the public servants to embrace the systems, uphold timeliness and be champions of service delivery. I call on the private sector to make full use of these platforms and continue providing feedback. I call on all Fijians to embrace digital services and be part of this national transformation. Let us continue this work with determination, unity and vision. Together we can create a Fiji, where opportunity flows more freely, where investment thrives, and where every citizen has a fair chance to succeed.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement on the advancing of Fiji's Ease of Doing Business through digital transformation and regulatory reform. But at this stage, I think a big thank you also to the former Minister, honourable Kamikamica, who actually took this also to another level.

The programme that is BusinessFIJI or BusinessNOW Fiji is a continuation of the programme which was called BizFIJI, started under the previous government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is extremely important that everyone should get on board, and I am talking about all the ministries with respect to this particular programme. It is not going to get to where it wants to be until all government departments are fully digitized, because it has to be interlinked.

I know firsthand, Sir, the problems that exist at the Titles Office. I know firsthand the problems that exist at the Local Government in terms of the Department of Town and Country Planning and all the problems that exist at Immigration, I know the problems that exist at the Ministry of Health, I know the problems that exist at Biosecurity Authority of Fiji. All of these Ministries that I have mentioned, need to be unified in terms of data sharing and digitisation for this to be successful. All of us want the same thing.

I can assure the honourable Minister that he will get the support of this House for us to get to that particular level. However, currently, as it stands, we are still lagging behind in terms of getting the digitisation completed. One of the things that is an obstacle – I think the honourable Minister recognises it and that is why his asking all civil servants to come on board in this – a classic example is the data sharding exercise. For some odd reason, we have ministries that like to hold on to their data and it is their mountain, and no one is allowed to enter it. It is a bit of a problem.

I am hoping that the honourable Minister for Lands has cured this problem; that they have to send someone on a daily basis to the Registrar of Titles to still get their information. At one stage, the Titles Office would not even allow them to enter. I hope that little problems like that are actually completed so that this BusinessNOW programme can be running at its optimum level. As you can see, there is the building permit issue that comes with it. New businesses in Fiji that are opening require it to be digitally done. It will require 100 percent commitment from every single Ministry.

From a legal perspective, Sir, a lot of the stuff on the ground does not happen. Even though we may stand here and talk about it, it does not happen. A classic example, we passed a Bill here with respect to adoption. We are getting complaints from lawyers that it is not being done, purely because the right things have not been put in place. This is where digitisation comes in, this is where the honourable Minister is asking for everyone's help.

I agree with him. He has a difficult task to get all of these done. Everyone needs to get on board, and we must ensure that every single institution and Ministry is properly digitised. Without that, it is not going to happen - you are not going to be able to do this one-stop shop business. We have had tremendous amount of difficulty for many, many moons to try and get this done. From a legal perspective, I know lawyers complain about this all the time. Recently, they did, with respect to issues at even the Company's Office, where at the moment, no one wants to sign, because there are too many people in acting capacities. These are the little things that will stop the progress of this particular programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has mentioned about the Permanent Secretaries and their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). With respect to future legislative amendments containing the necessary processes with respect to digitisation, that must be included in that particular legislation. Commendable, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 100 percent, and I think we all agree with that. However, in order for us to get to where we all aspire to – with all the countries that he has mentioned – requires a mindset change also. That particular mindset change needs to be inculcated into every civil servant with respect to getting this thing up to speed, and for BusinessNOW FIJI to be working at an optimum level; and for us to improve our ratings in terms of ease of doing business around the world. But it will not happen unless and until everyone comes on board.

It is important that the Permanent Secretaries are aware of that, and it is part of their KPIs to get it done. I agree with the honourable Minister, it is a big task and is commendable. This is probably about the third or fourth time that we have spoken about it in Parliament. However, the continuous reporting on this is a good issue, it is palatable for us at the end of the day, so we can keep an eye and check on it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the next Minister, honourable Members, please join me in warmly welcoming the students and teachers from Draunivi Public School in Ra. I know that you have truly overwhelmed us this morning. There are still parts of your group waiting outside to come in. I hope the honourable Minister responsible is watching to see that the gallery needs to be enlarged somewhat.

(Laughter)

On behalf of the honourable Members, I warmly welcome you to your Parliament. May your visit deepen your appreciation of the workings and offer some insight into the role of Parliament in playing as a safeguard of democracy in our country.

#### Progress of Timber Research in Fiji

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's forestry sector continues to play a vital role in our national economy. While logging alone contributes around 0.5 percent to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the broader forestry sector, through wood processing, manufacturing and other downstream activities is

valued at about \$140 million or roughly 1.4 percent of our real GDP. This sector supports exports, jobs and many industries, especially in our rural areas. Our pine and mahogany plantations remain major contributors to this growth. A significant part of this progress has been driven by years of dedicated research carried out by the Ministry of Forestry and our partners both here and overseas.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to update this House on the Ministry's ongoing research on timber to better understand the properties and potential uses of Fiji's lesser-known species, including some species that are currently considered invasive. Many tree species in our forests have been overlooked, simply because we have limited scientific information about their strength, durability and suitable uses. While some landowners may have traditional knowledge about these trees, we need clear and reliable data to guide the industry.

To address this Mr. Speaker, the Ministry established the Wood and Non-Wood Research and Development Project. The overall goal is to find new timber options that can substitute some of our more valuable native species, such as *vesi*, *yaka*, *dakua*, *kauvula* and *kaudamu*. To-date, the Ministry has identified 30 lesser-known timber species for detailed study, with research focused mainly on the forest research block at Nakavu Village in Namosi. We have completed research on nine of these species so far, as the like of *dulewa*, *kuluva*, *sa*, *velau*, *mako*, *tadalo*, *vutukana*, *dalo voci* and *kaunigai*. The findings have already proven useful to the commercial timber industry and to small-scale operators such as furniture makers and wood carvers.

Mr. Speaker, an article on the research was even published in the *Fiji Agricultural Journal* in 2014. Although progress on the remaining species was delayed by the impacts of *TC Winston* and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry continues to share the available research results with communities and industries to encourage the practical use of this species.

In addition to the lesser-known species, we have also prioritised research on white teak, an exotic species that has become well-established in the Western Highlands. Working closely with the community of Nalebaleba Village, we collected samples to test the wood strength and durability. Early findings show that white teak is a light hardwood suitable for house construction. This confirms what the villagers have for decades. Some have built homes with white teak frames dating back to the 1980s. To fully understand the durability of the species, Mr. Speaker, samples are now being tested in all three of our research trial sites around the country.

I also wish to update the House on the research we are undertaking on invasive species, particularly African tulip and *acacia*. While these species are usually seen as a problem, the Ministry views them as an opportunity. Instead of simply removing them, we are studying how they might be put to good use and contribute to our economy. We have completed wood density tests on *acacia* and continue to study other important wood properties. We are also working with Long Investment Sawmill in Savusavu to test whether *acacia*, white teak and African tulip can be used to produce veneer or plywood. This work will help determine whether these species can be commercially valuable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to advise the House that the Ministry has begun issuing harvesting licenses for African tulip specifically for biomass fuel at Nabou Green Energy Limited. In 2024, this facility contributed around 4 percent of Viti Levu's electricity. With planned improvements, it aims to increase its capacity to 60 percent. If it reaches maximum capacity, it could contribute up to 7 percent annually to the national grid. The African tulip helps fill gaps in biomass supply because it has a lower energy value. It is blended with cardboard waste, hog fuel and forest subsidies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what this research means to Fiji is simple. We are identifying new sources of timber that can support our industries, provide income for landowners, and reduce waste in our forests. Instead of leaving less popular or invasive species to rot after logging, we can now find ways to use them productively. This approach increases the value of forest resources, supports natural regeneration of desirable native species, boosts timber production per hectare and strengthens revenue streams for both landowner and the industry.

Ultimately, this work enhances the forestry sector's contribution to the national economy. While we have made significant progress, we must also recognize the challenges we face:

- (1) The need to further build the technical capacity of our staff  
High quality research requires ongoing training, professional development and exposure to regional and international research institutions to ensure our work meets global standards.
- (2) Research facilities require major upgrades  
Our laboratories, machinery and equipment have served us for many years, but they are no longer adequate for advanced wood property testing. I am pleased to inform the House that plans are already underway to modernise these facilities and procure new equipment to strengthen our research capabilities.
- (3) Funding  
This has always been a challenge. Wood research requires specialised tools that are often expensive. However, I am happy to report that this fiscal year the Research and Development Project has been allocated to \$225,000. This funding will support continued research on lesser-known species, both native and exotic, as well as important non-wood species such as bamboo, mahogany, rattan, agarwood and candlenut.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we look ahead, the Ministry will continue to build strong research partnerships with the private sector. These partnerships will help us share research findings more widely, generate new ideas and encourage future collaborations. With improved research facilities and stronger relationships with the industry, the Ministry will be better positioned to deliver advanced and impactful research that benefit landowners, communities, industries and the nation as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing I wish to emphasise that quality wood research is essential to the long-term growth and sustainability of Fiji's wood-based industry. It ensures we protect our forests, diversify our timber supply, strengthen our economy and support rural communities.

MR. SPEAKER.- I recognise now the balance of the children from Draunivi Public School; the boys have come in. You are most welcome to Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to the honourable Minister's Ministerial Statement this morning on the opportunities to further strengthen and improve our forest sector, particularly with the research that they have been undertaking.

We totally agree with the honourable Minister on most of the issues that she has raised. The sector has contributed significantly to the economy and of course provides employment and livelihood for most of our people as well.

If I may go back, we acknowledge the work undertaken particularly for lesser-known timber species, but I still remember in my limited time in the Ministry, there are still issues pending for quite a number of years on a few of the species that were introduced to Fiji, particularly mahogany. What is happening to *cordia*, *maesopsis*, *cadamba* in the areas where mahogany was introduced? They are

still there, and if we can look at other alternatives for these species to be better utilised as well.

The honourable Minister has talked about acacia and African tulip. Honourable Minister, there is a species on cinnamon, I do not know the scientific name, but a few years back, the late Mr. George Patel was interested in cinnamon. There is a lot of it in Dreketi, this is invasive in Mago Island, and we know how useful cinnamon is, particularly for health benefits. It is there and it can be commercialised, but these are opportunities, probably if we pay more attention on this and with the focusing of the required resources and efforts, we should be able to convert these into economic benefits as well.

Thank you for mentioning about the African tulip. I know that African tulip and *gliricidia* were considered for options for renewable energy. A few years back while still actively involved in the climate space, as the climate champion, pellets of African tulip mixed with others, were brought in the office and I still keep that in the Ministry of Agriculture's cabinet. You will find some wooden pellets there. These were the ones that were brought in, and there were high hopes in Tailevu, particularly Wainibuka and Waibau areas, this is what is commonly known as *pasi* - it is all over Fiji.

If this can be converted into these pellets that we can produce energy out of it, it will be good for us in terms of our reduction in our fossil fuel use. So, these are opportunities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and maybe I can talk to the honourable Minister about some of the work that was done previously.

We just need to collaborate more with our agencies. I know that the Pacific Community (SPC) helps us in our research. But we just came back from Brazil, and I told the honourable Niudamu - "look at PNG, they are here in big numbers, because Article 6 of the Paris Agreement is controlled by Brazil." The three big players in the forest sector are Brazil, Congo and Indonesia. Maybe we can look at opportunities to work with them in terms of our research, because they are big in this area. And within the region, we can work again with Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, and even PNG.

Honourable Minister, may I also mention about bamboo. Bamboo, together with Indonesia, is one of the species that we have looked at previously as well. Of course, we need to upskill our people, and perhaps the last suggestion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is just to work, we need more applied research now, particularly working with the industries because now, we are into the second cycle of our forests. There are a lot of issues now about regeneration and spacing, particularly when it comes to mahogany. We need to do more applied science; the industries will help you in terms of funding and technical expertise so that we can realise the huge potential that is there in the sector. We will be happy to share with the honourable Minister on some of the work undertaken previously.

#### Update on Fiji Roads Authority Work Programme

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen. A special welcome to Draunivi Public School - students, parents and supporters who are here today and, of course, the teachers.

I am pleased to present an update on the major achievements for the financial years 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 Plans of the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA). These periods mark significant milestones in Fiji's ongoing journey towards modern, resilient, and inclusive infrastructure development, underscoring the Government's unwavering commitment to fostering connectivity, safety, socio-economic fulfilment and sustainable growth.

During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the FRA utilised a total of \$329 million for the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges nationwide. Of this amount, \$281 million was directed towards

maintenance, emergency works and renewals; \$11 million was allocated for new capital programmes; and \$31 million supported the Transport Infrastructure Investment Sector Project.

These strategic allocations enabled the delivery of a wide range of critical projects aimed at upgrading and maintaining Fiji's essential road networks. The FRA's efforts during the year were centred on extensive maintenance works, infrastructure enhancements, and the initiation of new capital developments, all contributing to the transformation of Fiji's transport landscape to better serve communities across the country.

Throughout this period, the FRA delivered substantial infrastructure upgrades across all divisions — urban, rural, and outer islands — emphasising resilience to climate change. All new structures, including roads, bridges and jetties were designed and constructed to meet the highest standards of safety and climate resilience, ensuring their durability amid increasingly severe weather events. The projects prioritised equitable access to services such as education, healthcare, markets and employment, serving both urban and rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, in the Central Division, major road upgrades under the asphalt overlay and resealing programme were implemented along Rewa Street, Laucala Bay Road, Ratu Dovi Road, Khalsa Road, Princess Road, McGregor Road, Kalabu Tax Free Zone, Nausori CBD, Wainibokasi Road and Draubuta. The total cost of delivering the above projects was \$39 million, covering a total of 64 kilometres, aimed at improving road quality, enhancing safety and extending the lifespan of critical transport infrastructure.

In addition, resealing works were successfully completed along Queen's Road, from Pacific Harbour to Wainadoi, Sawani–Serea Road, and the Seal Road Extension at Koronivia Road and Ratu Kadavulevu Road. A new link road connecting Queen's Road to Naimelimeli Village has also been developed to further enhance connectivity and accessibility. This project, funded through the New Capital Access Budget was at a cost of \$15.9 million, and is designed to improve traffic flow and reduce travel times for road users. Other additional upgrade works continue in Serua and Namosi.

In the Eastern Division, the upgrading of Levuka Town main street was prioritised to support local commerce and tourism. Under the Emergency Restoration Works allocation, one of the major achievements this year has been the implementation of extensive road rehabilitation works across our Eastern islands in the maritime. This initiative represents a total investment of over \$30 million, covering approximately 318 kilometres.

These include work initiated and continuing work across Lakeba, Moala, Koro, Gau, Vanuabalavu, Rotuma, Cicia and Matuku, where long-neglected routes are being restored to ensure that island communities remain connected to essential services and markets. The scope of works includes grading, shaping and compacting existing carriageways, clearing and de-silting drains, constructing new drainage systems, replacing culverts, widening jetty causeways, building waiting sheds, and installing coastal protection through riprap to safeguard vulnerable coastal sections from erosion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these developments are already delivering significant socio-economic benefits, Improving access to healthcare, education and markets for more than 15,000 households. Reliable and safer roads now make it easier for farmers to move produce or students to reach schools, and for emergency services to respond properly during adverse weather. Through these investments, we are not only improving connectivity but also supporting livelihoods through increasing development and ensuring that no community is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Kadavu, I have already updated Parliament in the last session and will

provide an update on Taveuni at a later date.

Under the Village and School Frontage Sealing and Seal Extension Programme, numerous schools, villages and settlements have benefited from improved road conditions along Ratu Kadavulevu Road, Naduru Road, Noco Delta-Draubuta Village Frontage, Koronivia Road, Vuci Road, Vunidawa Road and Sawani-Serea Road. These works not only have enhanced accessibility and safety but also reduced dust pollution, creating a cleaner and healthier environment, especially for students, and village residents.

Urban infrastructure also underwent significant revitalisation, including asphalt overlay and drainage upgrades at the Suva Bus Stand, valued at \$1.2 million, to enhance passenger comfort and operational efficiency. Additionally, asphalt overlay works in key urban areas have improved road safety, accessibility and visual appeal, supporting the Government's vision of developing modern, resilient and well-connected urban cities.

On the Western Division Achievement Updates, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the major road upgrades completed in the Western Division include the Main Street Nadi, Rakiraki Dama sites, Nadi Bay Road, Wailoaloa Road and Balawa Street, Lautoka. These roads were resealed and resurfaced, providing improved connectivity for residents.

Under the Emergency Restoration Works Programme, key improvements were also done along King Road (Nabulini/Dama Slip) and Queens Road (Bulu/Maui Bay). These upgrades have strengthened road stability, improved safety for motorists and ensured the continuous flow of traffic along Fiji's major transport corridors. The works also enhance access to essential services and support economic activities by providing more reliable routes, not only for commuters, but also for freight operations.

Under the Village and School Frontage Sealing and Seal Extension Programme, a total of \$2.8 million was invested to upgrade approximately 3.6 kilometres of road frontages, including Koronisagana Village, Waikubukubu Village in Nadarivatu, Tau Village, Loloma Primary School (Vatukoula) and Nawai Secondary School. These upgrades have significantly improved accessibility, reduced dust infiltration into schools and created a safer and cleaner environment.

The success of these initiatives has demonstrated the programme's positive impact on communities' wellbeing and rural mobility. Consequently, similar projects are ongoing for implementation in the current financial year to extend such benefits. Other key works to improve village and community access continued in Nadroga, Nadi, Ba and Ra.

On the Northern Division Achievement Updates, the Northern Division saw significant improvements in terms of asphalt overlay and road seal renewal works along Labasa Town Main Street and Savusavu Town Main Street, enhancing road quality and safety.

On Emergency Restoration Works Programme, key rehabilitation projects were undertaken in Wainikoro, Vunivutu, Nayarabale, Buca Bay, and Napuka, restoring vital road access, improving safety, and strengthening connectivity for communities affected especially by weather-related damages.

Under the Village and School Frontage Sealing and Seal Extension Programme, road surfacing and frontage improvements were carried out at Korotolutolu Primary School, Solove Primary School, Navidamu Road, Vunimanuca Primary School, Kawakawavesi Road (Seaqaqa), Qawa Primary School, Vunivau Road (Labasa), Batiri Village Frontage and Old Nabouwalu Road (Batiri).

In terms of Jetty Infrastructure Programmes, significant progress has been made with new and refurbished jetties completed on Lomaloma, Cicia, Korolevu and Rotuma. These facilities are vital lifelines, ensuring safe and reliable access to healthcare, education and essential supplies. The ongoing upgrades are delivering wide socio-economic benefits, improved market access, and enabling faster emergency responses. With those improvements, Sir, we continue to look forward to reduce the rural to urban migration and ensuring that our rural centres are at an acceptable level of development.

In terms of Critical Bridges, the \$3.3 million Naseyani Bridge in Ra was one of the 10 critical bridges identified, which was completed and officially opened, serving more than 200 residents. The Bridge plays a key role in linking the interior of Rakiraki District with Saivou District, ensuring safer travel, and supporting community and economic growth. In addition, progress continues on the Waidalice Bridge, the final project among the 10 critical bridges, which is now under active construction and expected to further strengthen transport connectivity once completed.

On Transport Investment Infrastructure Sector Programmes, a significant project has been achieved on major infrastructure initiatives through the partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank, particularly in advancing the procurement and funding of the four critical bridges, as I have already mentioned - Lami, Medruku, Veseisei and Sabeto. These projects are critical in enhancing road safety, regional connectivity and economic resilience.

In addition, \$30 million has been allocated to advance key consultancy and design works for Ba-Rakiraki and Wailotua-Dama sections of the King's Road, as well as Lami-Korotogo section of the Queen's Road, together with the design of 40 critical bridges nationwide. These initiatives lay a strong foundation for a safer, better-connected and climate-resilient transport network across Fiji.

For 2025-2026, we acknowledge the progress and achievements of the previous year. It is equally important that we continue this work in the current financial year 2025-2026. There are a few key series of transformative initiatives. Firstly, the recruitment of critical technical support staff has already been identified as a key factor, and this remains a strategic priority to right-size the Authority and strengthen institutional capacity in engineering, maintenance, project management and monitoring. This investment in human resources ensures that FRA can effectively deliver the Government's ambitious infrastructure programme and respond to the growing demands of a modern transport network.

A total of \$119 million has been allocated for the maintenance of the existing 6,300 kilometres of roads, including bridges, crossings and jetties. This funding ensures that our transport assets are maintained to the required standards, enhancing safety and providing reliable access.

A total of \$105 million has been committed for road and service renewals. These works continue, including sealed road rehabilitation such as rip and remake, resealing, drilling, filling and asphalt resurfacing. This allocation includes the renewal of traffic and street lighting, and the upgrading or replacement of critical bridges across the country, such as Waidalice, Koronivia, Savu 5, Gatward Bridge, Nalele Bridge, and Naqai Bridge in Taveuni. The procurement of box culverts will further improve flood resilience and ensure safer crossing for rural communities.

To enhance maritime accessibility and economic opportunity in island communities, \$15 million has been allocated and currently being utilised to commence the first phase of construction for two new jetties -Makogai and Koro, out of the six planned under this programme. These jetties serve as vital lifelines, providing safer access to markets, schools, health facilities, et cetera.

Furthermore, \$72.5 million has been budgeted for new and ongoing capital projects

nationwide. These include the first phase construction of the Rewa-Vutia Road and Bridge Project, seal extensions in the Central Division, and the sealing of Kavanagasau Road to improve agricultural access. Other major projects include the first-phase construction of Fletcher Road and Ratu Dovi Road widening, the Labasa Tramline Bypass, Extension Street Bypass, and the upgrade of Ratu Sukuna Road. The FRA will undertake feasibility studies to address traffic congestion in the Central, Western and Northern Divisions, paving the way for long-term urban mobility planning.

An additional \$18 million has been set aside for the upgrading and maintenance of 1,300 kilometres of institutional and other public roads, directly benefiting schools, hospitals, Government facilities and essential community centres. With the continued support of the ADB and World Bank, \$51.1 million has been allocated for the first-phase construction of the four critical bridges, as already mentioned and identified.

Finally, the \$70 million Tamavua-i-wai Bridge Project, funded through a grant from the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), commenced its first phase this year. Once completed, this new structure will replace the existing bridge, improve traffic flow between Suva and Lami and will significantly reduce travel times, and will also be the first phase in enabling the four-lane from Lami-Wailekutu onwards. By modernising and upgrading critical infrastructure, we are not only improving access and safety but also laying the foundation for long-term economic growth.

All 2025-2026 capital projects outlined are progressing in some form or another, and an update will be provided in Quarter 4 of the financial year. In addition, I am pleased to advise Parliament that the preliminary technical and scoping work for the \$300 million People's Republic of China Vanua Levu Road Project continues to progress satisfactorily, with the PRC and Fiji Teams currently on the ground in Vanua Levu, working to conclude this exercise and have a big groundbreaking in Quarter 1 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the 2025-2026 infrastructure development plans are more than just physical upgrades - they are investments in the future of Fiji's people, and embody our commitment to create a safer, healthier and more prosperous nation. Ideally, we need to be working in a more IT or Artificial Intelligence-enabled environment, especially in planning, this is especially in terms of database or having dashboards of the current situation and ensuring that these are readily available and in an easy-to-read format. This would include roads, bridges, crossings, jetties - what is currently there, what is its current situation, and then superimpose upon it a vision strategic plan for roads, bridges, jetties, et cetera, from the period 2026 to 2056. This is something or a plan we are currently actively working on with our development partners, specifically Australia and New Zealand, and impose this on the current dashboards so that we have a clear pathway on the way forward. Not only that, we have a second imposition, that a strategic financing plan on that Vision Strategic plan 2026 - 2056, for us to not only have a clear pathway forward, but a clear financing plan moving forward.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his very detailed update on all the work that is being done by the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and the plans it has. It is not an easy task and there will always be issues with roads, as the people outside always say, we have to get all the potholes fixed.

Nevertheless, I am glad to hear of the plans that are in place, seeing the development of the strategic plan for 2024-2025 to 2028-2029, and today we have learned of another longer-term plan that Government is planning for 2026 up to 2056. I think it will be ideal also for Government to get some feedback on some of the key indicators that have been identified in that plan for 2024-2025, which is to get the 11 jetties done up, and the 10 percent reduction in travel time during peak hours. I think the target is for 2026 or 2027, and another further 10 percent in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has given us a lot of information. It is very good to see the resealing and improvement of roads. I think if there is one thing that we are worried about, especially where we have a lot of traffic, is the quality of the road markers, especially now that we are getting into the rainy season. It is very difficult sometimes for people to see the lanes. I think as we are doing the resealing, the asphalt, and the improvement of the loads in the high-profile cars area, we need to make sure that they put good road markings. I have a difficulty seeing the road markings, and when you have these new fancy lights that are very bright in your eyes, it is almost impossible to address them. Maybe I need lights on my glasses too.

The honourable Minister talked about, later on, giving an update on the roads in Kadavu and I am thankful for that. I see that in the project that we have, we have the Vunisea-Vacalea Road. Just an update to the honourable Minister that at the moment, the gravel is only up to Soso. It needs to be completed right down to Nacomoto and then further on, from Joma. Going onward, it is still not done. I hope that the budget we have here of \$1.38 million will be expended this year to complete that particular road.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have raised in the past that FRA has done a good job in bringing the road from Yawe down to Naqalotu, but the ongoing road from Naqalotu to Lomaji and across to Daviqele is something that I encourage FRA to work together with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, perhaps to do the initial cut and complete that particular road all across the southern parts of Kadavu.

I am glad to see the programmes that are in the project for FRA - Nasauvakarua Access Road, Waidrata up in Nabua, Nasau-Naivaka Road, I see that there is a good budget there. I hope to see that it is completed shortly and also the road going up from Nasasa to Nadogo, Valovoni-Saqani, to open up all these areas that have a lot of potential for agriculture. There are very good agriculture facilities in all of these particular areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I also would like to congratulate the World Bank, ADB and the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) for the work that they have done. There will always be complaints about roads, and I think it is always for us and FRA to be able to work on this.

There is one other area that I think that FRA, and I know these are non-FRA roads, but the roads in the areas around Suva where you have a lot of population density, that are not FRA roads, but people use these roads to access. I have talked about them before - Savutalele and Rokara and all of these places. Sometimes, they need better assistance to make sure that people can get to work on time.

There is one last thing that we need to do, I think over the past few years, there has been an emphasis on not spending a little money on long lengths of road but making sure that you are going to build smaller lengths of road but make it last for a long time. I think that there is a need for more resilience in the design that we have. I think it is going to be a challenge also, as the honourable Minister has pointed out today, the bridge down to Vutia and is going to be a big development project. The actual design of that, crossing the Rewa River and across the mangrove swamps, I think the people of Vutia and Rewa are looking forward to that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister, and we are looking forward to a continued improvement. There is a lot of requests for bus stops all around the Western Division and all these areas, I know there is not enough budget for them, but there will always be that request and we hope that FRA can address this concern, especially where children are concerned, when they get off the bus, they have to have shelter from the rain, et cetera.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Usamate for his response on behalf of the Opposition.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 10.48 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.27 a.m.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### Recruitment of Legal Drafters (Question No. 279/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General inform Parliament on whether Government is considering the recruitment of legal drafters to assist in fast-tracking the drafting of Bills?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in answering this question, I must first emphasise the significant role of legislative drafters to any Government and society.

Legislative drafters, also known as Parliamentary Counsel or Legislative Counsel or Statute Law Drafters, in other jurisdictions, are essential, although often unseen, are architects of a nation's legal framework. A legislative drafter is a technical bridge who translates policy ideas or concepts into precise and forcible legal language, bridging the gap between political intention and practical, actionable law. A legislative drafter also ensures that the law is drafted with clarity, precision and certainty, and using his or her expertise to choose every word with extreme care to minimise ambiguity and ensure the law is clear to all.

Legislative drafters ensure new laws do not contradict or undermine existing laws. They identify which existing laws require necessary amendments or repeal to accommodate new laws. They use consistent terminology across all legislation, which is crucial for legal interpretation and Legislative Drafters Act, as a critical first line of defense against unconstitutional or rights-infringing legislation often advising policymakers on how to achieve their policy through law in a manner that upholds the constitutional and human rights standards.

Legislative drafters are indispensable, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They are not partitioned technical experts. Without them, the legal systems would quickly become chaotic, contradictory, and just mess. Legislative drafters' work, though done behind the scenes, is a cornerstone of good governance and stable society.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, Sir, acknowledge that one of our very own drafters, as you are aware, is Justice Alipate Qetaki. The other, Sir, is the late Rupeni Nawaqakuta. We lost him in 2022. I also acknowledge that the Secretary-General to Parliament, is a former drafter from the 90s.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government appreciates and recognizes the paramount significance, the roles of our legislative drafters play in our society. From when this Government entered into Parliament in 2023, we had a team of five legislative drafters at the Office of the Attorney General. Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a total of nine active legislative drafters, which is being led by the Chief Law Draftsperson, who has more than a decade of practical experience in legislative drafting.

Our team of nine legislative drafters is significantly larger than most of the Pacific Island countries, Mr. Speaker, including Papua New Guinea and Samoa, whilst many smaller Pacific nations, for example, Tuvalu, may have only one or two drafters, and some often rely on external

consultants or support from regional organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2023, our legislative drafters at the Office of the Attorney General, assisted our ministries in translating policy to legislation, thus producing nine Bills that were tabled in Parliament, with 28 being enacted as Acts. In 2024, our legislative drafters assisted the ministries in drafting 23 Bills that were tabled in Parliament, which were enacted as Acts of Parliament. This year, our legislative drafters assisted the ministries in drafting 36 Bills, till the previous sitting of Parliament, with 23 being enacted as Acts. And in total, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our legislative drafters have drafted 88 Bills from 2023 to 2025, with 72 being enacted as Acts of Parliament.

I must stress here that it is not a wise, illegal or practical exercise for Government to be engaging legislative drafters to fast-track the drafting of Bills. Mr. Speaker, Sir, fast-tracking the drafting of Bills will lead to poorly drafted laws that are often ambiguous, inconsistent with existing laws, contain loopholes, creating uncertainty and unintended consequences, implementation failure, and extensive litigation.

Fast-tracking the drafting of bills directly challenges the principles of good governance, such as participation through consultation, transparency and accountability, and the rule of law. And ethical considerations, such as duty of care, are also important. Justice, fairness and procedural justice.

There can be justifiable exceptions, Mr. Speaker, for genuine emergencies, where the need for immediate action outweighs the risk of rush process. However, it should be done with transparency. This Government's approach is efficient deliberation and not rush-drafting. We prioritise in getting the law right over getting it fast. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our well-drafted Bill allows for effective parliamentary debate and public understanding of new laws that affect their lives, fostering trust in their Government.

A question that we should really ask, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is whether the Government is considering the recruitment of legal drafters to assist in fostering the drafting of bills, but whether the Government is considering investing into and strengthening the capacity and resource of our legislative drafters so that they are able to overcome the immense challenges and workload whilst meeting the goals and competing political priorities of Government. And what step is Government taking to ensure that policy instructors within each ministry have the necessary capacity to be able to provide drafting instructions which are reflective of the individual ministry's policy intent.

Government has considered this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have put this into action. In February 2025, two of our legislative drafters attended a policy training in Canberra, Australia, organised by the Australian Attorney-General's Department. And they have in turn returned, provided training to ministries in understanding their policies, the legislative process, and bridging the gap between policy and legislation.

Next month, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Attorney-General, through the Legislative Drafting Division will be organising a legislation policy training for Permanent Secretaries, policy and technical officers, and members of Cabinet Subcommittee on Legislation, to assist Ministries in providing a clear and approved drafting instructions that correctly reflect their policy intent.

We also encourage and support our drafters to attend training and conferences by the Commonwealth Association of Legislative Counsel (CALC), which organises a yearly conference to promote cooperation in matters of professional interest among people in the Commonwealth engaged in legislative drafting.

Two of our drafters attended the CALC Conference in Australia 2023, and another two attended in February this year. A few of our drafters are also members of CALC. Their attendance at this yearly conference has proven to be rewarding and impactful for legislative drafters, and they get to engage in dialogue and learning from seasoned legislative drafters throughout the Commonwealth.

The CALC Conference and related legislative drafters training needs to be enshrined in Government priorities for the development of legislative drafters, ensuring that two or more drafters attend such conference and training for capacity building purposes.

Our drafters have also taken a lead role in the Pacific region by co-organising the first ever Pacific Legislative Drafters Conference (PLDC) with Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network (PILON), and with the support of the Australia Attorney-General held in Nadi this year on the theme, "Developing Laws in the Pacific by the People, by the Pacific for the Pacific".

This PLDC Conference brought together legislative drafters and senior officials from 19 Pacific countries and territories, including Australia and New Zealand, and provided a platform for drafters across the region to openly dialogue on legislative drafting opportunities and challenges, share drafting techniques and collaborate with stakeholders.

As stated by the Solicitor-General in his address as the Chair of PILON, the Fijian Government, therefore, recognises the need for greater investment in capacity building of legislative drafters, and as such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the increase in the number of Ministries and shifting priorities, there is a need to increase the number of legislative drafters.

As a matter of retention, there is also a need, through Government support, to ensure our legislative drafters are well resourced and provide a salary that commensurate with the specialised level of work and skills by drafters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to encourage, support and invest in resource strengthening and capacity building for our legislative drafters, which is a goal that the Government aims to achieve, a goal and priority that is reflected in the Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you, honourable Attorney-General for the answer to that question. One of the key reform areas that was identified by you in your report on the functional status of Fiji's law and justice sector reform was streamlining legislative drafting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a little bit of background, I also understand the challenges that are currently faced in light of the fact that there is a considerable number of Bills that we need to get to the Parliament floor. In the interim, because of the lack of drafters available to get this done efficiently, have we advertised offshore or asked for assistance from our development partners to provide drafters so that these Bills can be brought to Parliament in a timely fashion?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Maharaj replied to my message on Monday about my travel to New Zealand, and this is one of the subject matters that I discussed with my counterpart. However, as already articulated in this House, it is a problem faced by many countries, but we are hopeful, and I believe that the Commonwealth will be providing two lawyers in the new year.

There is ongoing discussion with the Commonwealth. Currently, we have one officer who is seconded from the Commonwealth working in our office. Unfortunately, they cannot provide us with five or six. It is a problem that we face, but we will continue to look for drafters. In fact, I went to

five or six. It is a problem that we face, but we will continue to look for drafters. In fact, I went to New Zealand specifically to look for one of our drafters who was trained by Mr. Nawaqakuta, who is currently working in the Ministry of Civil Aviation. It would be great to have her. I have asked her if she could be engaged for three months or six months, just to dedicate that for specific Bills. However, these are ongoing. It is on my table, wherever I go, in terms of having discussions with our counterparts.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, is something being done in conjunction with the Ministry of Education to incentivise this particular area, in terms of whether it is TELS or scholarship, et cetera, so that we start producing more and more drafters in Fiji? Is it incentivised for our students to take up that particular avenue of career?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, not with the Ministry of Education, but I think it is an area that we can discuss with the three law schools in Fiji, to encourage lawyers to take up drafting. As you all understand, you come out of law school as a general lawyer and after graduation, you specialise in civil, criminal, and then family. We all understand it is quite difficult to get attention in terms of drafters.

I can say that most of the drafters from the Attorney-General's Chambers who have left have done well and are now acting as consultants. It is a pity that they left. However, the good thing is that we also have young people whom we can train and ensure we provide attractive conditions, so that they can stay and better serve the nation. Speaking with the law schools, that would be an alternative option.

Sustainable Waste Actions in the Pacific Project  
(Question No. 280/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on the Letter of Agreement on Sustainable Waste Actions in the Pacific Project Phase 2?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members; I thank honourable Matasawalevu for the question, and I rise to provide a response to this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, waste management and pollution control remains one of the most pressing environmental challenges faced in Fiji, as well as other Pacific Island countries. With increasing waste generation driven by urbanisation and changing consumption patterns, our existing waste management system requires significant upgrades.

Similarly, marine pollution caused by oil and grease spills from vessels, including contamination of our riverine and water flow systems due to poorly managed landfills, all contribute to the environmental risks that significantly affect our communities.

These challenges are further compounded by limited land availability for new landfill sites, the rising cost of waste transport and disposal, and the increasing frequency of climate-related events, which disrupt already-stretched waste systems. This makes regional cooperation and external support critical to strengthening national and local efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Sustainable Waste Action in the Pacific Projects Phase 2 (SWAPP 2), is a regional initiative funded by the Agency of the Frontiers Development (AFD) and implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP). This three-year project will run from 2025 to 2028, supporting seven Pacific Island countries – Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and two French territories.

The project focuses on three core objectives:

- (1) supporting the development and implementation of national waste management policies and actions, including collection, sorting, recycling and proper disposal.
- (2) improving waste services through strengthened infrastructure and pilot projects to address priority waste streams.
- (3) building technical, financial, and governance capacity within the waste sector for long-term sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, SWAPP 2 seeks not only to strengthen national systems, but also to improve complementarity and coordination among existing regional initiatives, such as the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), Cleaner Seas and J-PRISM III. This ensures that countries like Fiji receive coherent, and mutually reinforcing support across the multiple programmes.

The benefits for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Fiji, SWAP II will deliver targeted support in four key areas:

- (1) Reducing marine litter through improved surveys, coastal cleanups, data collection and community awareness that informs national policy interventions.
- (2) Improving used oil management, including stakeholder training, feasibility studies and strengthened systems for collection, storage and eventual safe disposal of used oil.
- (3) Strengthening solid waste management, which entails instalment of three additional trash booms by Trash Boom Fiji, such as the one the Ministry has initiated at the Nabukalou Creek, located opposite MHCC here in Suva. Additionally, we will continue supporting composting and recycling initiatives for rural communities so that waste at source is better managed.
- (4) Enhancing regional cooperation and knowledge sharing to ensure Fiji is aligned with best practices and lessons learned across the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these interventions will support Fiji's broader waste management reforms, complementing our current review of the Container Deposit Regulation, in and our effort to transition towards more circular and resource-efficient waste systems.

Update on the letter, as asked by the honourable Rokomatu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's participation in SWAP II was formalised through the Letter of Agreement signed on 3rd November, 2025 between SPREP and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. Under this Agreement, Fiji is allocated €292,000 for national activities. All funds will be managed directly by SPREP in line with the financial agreement and SPREP's procurement procedures.

The SWAP II project will run until 30th September, 2028, with all national activities to be completed by 31st August, 2028. All equipment and assets procured by SWAP II will be transferred to the Ministry upon completion, to ensure continuity of the project outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the signing of the Agreement, the Ministry has commenced preparatory discussions with SPREP to finalise the implementation schedule, activity design and national coordination arrangements. This includes planning with the key stakeholders for training,

surveys, infrastructure support and community-level activities expected to commence in February 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, the SWAP II project presents a timely and important opportunity for Fiji to strengthen our national waste management system and reduce pollution risks. It reinforces our commitment to safeguarding public health, protecting our environment, and supporting the transition to a more sustainable and circular economy. The Ministry remains committed to ensuring the effective and timely implementation of the project for the benefit of all Fijians.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister, in light of the fact that sustainable waste actions are critical and important, will all of these work culminate in a Sustainable Waste Management Act, which will inculcate good behaviour in the populace and eventually companies?

MR. SPEAKER.- Do you wish for him to elaborate? Can you elaborate a bit more?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- After all these work, is there going to be a culmination of all those into a Sustainable Waste Management Act? Are you going to go towards ensuring that we have an Act in place so that we can inculcate good behaviour in companies and the populace?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, yes, there will be progressive work towards doing an Act in the future, and this afternoon we will also be moving the Environment Management Act, which will also capture and fill the gaps that are in the current implementation we have in terms of Sustainable Waste Management.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, through you, I want to thank the honourable Minister for this partnership. Unfortunately, Sir, there was no mention about these dump sites and all these municipal councils that appear before the standing committee have raised concerns about the dump sites. I would like to ask the honourable Minister, if any work has been done in regard to the dump sites. The municipal councils have this challenge in their respective districts.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, there is progressive work with the Ministry of Local Government. We have a working committee that is looking into it. We are trying to establish another landfill in the West, especially the one in Vunato, Lautoka and moving the one in Sigatoka, which is also an eyesore, but there is progressive work on that, and surely in due time, these municipal councils will find better sites that will contain the waste that is coming from towns and even the rural areas.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the recent Parliament Segment of COP 30, one of the key issues from the four sessions that we had was on methane. Key contributors are agriculture and waste. How is methane being addressed in this sustainable waste action, or SWAPP II, it is a big concern now, because in terms of global gas emission, methane is worse than carbon dioxide. This is one of the key issues that Parliament is required to look into, as well as part of our NDCs.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for that question, and the issue that is raised on methane is quite very important. As I have already mentioned and alluded to in the SWAPP II and the targeted support key areas that this phase will be focusing on, we will be taking that suggestion on board on methane and also work very closely with the Ministry of Agriculture. They have some activities that also looks into that. We will ensure that this is also part of Phase 2 and even Phase 3 on how that is also addressed for the Leader of the

Opposition's suggestion from the recent COP30 and what Parliament needs to achieve, especially in our NDCs.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, since he has discussed marine litter and solid waste management, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister if the derelict ships and wrecks around our harbours are also included because it is a huge challenge. I know that it has been discussed with the Minister for Public Works and Transport. Is this subject being included in the discussions?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently we have got a joint committee between the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and the Ministry of Public Works with MSAF. The issue here is that under the Environment Management Act, the Ministry do not have the power to remove those derelict vessels. The power is with MSAF to remove those vessels, and currently we have established a Captain Jonathan Smith Fund named after the late *Uto ni Yalo* captain.

That Fund has been funded by a few philanthropists from the Blue Prosperity, and that will help in the removal of those vessels that are in Suva Harbour. It is big work because of the removal of that, and even for scrap metal companies. So, 40 plus vessels are being submerged, and I think they have already removed around 18 to 20, and that work will continue. We would also like to thank the *iqoligoli* owners of Suvavou and the Turaga Tui Suva, who are also working closely with the Government in supporting this effort to clean up our oceans and ocean wastes.

Equal Access to Teaching and Learning Resources  
(Question No. 281/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the Ministry's plans to ensure that students and teachers in remote or disadvantaged areas have equal access to teaching and learning resources?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I reiterate that this question relates to information that are publicly available regarding the strategy of how the Ministry addresses those schools in disadvantaged areas. The Ministry's plan to ensure students and teachers in remote and disadvantaged areas have equal access to teaching and learning resources through initiatives like digital infrastructure, development such as installing internet, provision of computers, provision of transport assistance, and also looking after teacher welfare.

As for bridging the digital divide, the Ministry is actively investing in ICT infrastructure to enable modern teaching and learning practices, particularly in the rural and maritime schools. These initiatives include the deployment of Starlink supplied internet, and the installation of solar power system in rural and maritime schools. We are actively trying to reduce disparity access, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These upgrades ensure remote schools can participate fully in online learning, utilise digital learning resources, and engage in real-time communication.

Sir, 15 schools have been assisted with Starlink connection, funded by the Ministry of Education, 40 schools are currently being assisted with internet connectivity and solar power through Its Time Foundation. Our collaboration with the Giga project aims to ensure that all schools in Fiji are connected to the internet by 2030. We have successfully mapped approximately 95 percent of schools into the Giga platform and will use the data to implement targeted interventions for reliable and high-quality internet access. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Digital Equipment Initiative, where 20 schools have been selected, will be equipped with essential digital teaching and learning resources, including laptops, smart TVs, and multimedia projectors tailored to each school's specific needs.

Digital learning platforms and content, through the Standard Centralised Learning Management System (LMS), the Ministry is advancing the implementation of national e-learning platforms to support equitable and scalable digital learning. The LMS provides a structured environment where teachers can host lessons, share resources, access progress, and facilitate interactive learning, ensuring students in remote areas access the same curriculum-aligned digital content as those in urban schools. Our partnership with Education Perfect is another transformative step, combining curriculum reliability, adaptive technology, and data-driven teaching to enhance the learning outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has begun working towards a piloting Moodle programme, for those who went to university, the Moodle programme, or Moole facility was part of its long-term digital learning strategy. Nine schools have been selected for Phase 1 implementation in 2026. This will support the Year 13 Flexi Grades Bridge Programme which incorporates a blended approach of face-to-face instruction and independent learning via Moodle, promoting research and self-directed learning for transition to tertiary study.

The Ministry has entered a strategic partnership to roll out the digital learning initiative in 20 pilot schools, as a first phase of its national digital transformation agenda. Following the pilot programme, the Ministry aims to scale this initiative to a full national rollout, with priority given to remote, rural and maritime schools to address long-standing inequalities in access to learning materials. This approach, Mr. Speaker, also ensures resilience during disruptions, such as pandemics or natural disasters.

We also have the provision of qualified and experienced teachers, looking after teacher welfare and support. Policies have been developed to ensure it promotes a predictable cycle, like currently two tours or three tours for teachers to be transferred to new schools. As we all know that a longer period of stay of teachers in a particular school can lead to negative work productivity.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of teacher welfare, continuous rebuilding, refurbishment of teachers' quarters to allow better living conditions for our teachers. The Ministry is also contributing to those in the rural and maritime areas, in terms of provision of transport assistance, in the form of boats and outboard engines to schools in rural and maritime areas to ensure that students are travelling safely and easily to and from the school. We also have the provision of rural service licence schemes.

Mr. Speaker, to improve physical access for maritime and interior schools, the Ministry has provided 34 boats and 42 engines, benefitting 42 schools and more than 4,300 students. This initiative is to ensure that despite their geographical location, does not hinder the attendance of students in school. We have also supplied 258 water tanks to 123 schools in the rural and remote areas, supporting 15,000 students nationwide, guaranteeing reliable access to clean water. Also, through building grants, we have assisted 120 schools with the construction and upgrading of classrooms, wash facilities, teachers' quarters, positively impacting over 21,000 students.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we have also paid list premiums for 25 schools, securing land tenure and uninterrupted education for more than 3,000 students. These combined activities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from providing boats and water tanks to deploying Starlink and centralising our LMS, reflect the Ministry's unwavering commitment to bridging educational gaps, and ensuring that every child, regardless of location, enjoys equal opportunities for quality teaching and learning.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for providing a very comprehensive response. The information that you have provided, honourable Minister, is not publicly available. Very good plans that you have provided – thank you very much for that.

In remote and maritime areas, the schools have a small roll, the honourable Minister is aware of that. Based on this, the schools get a very small amount of free education grant. This grant is used by the schools to buy the teaching and learning resources because FEG is currently based on school roll, and it is not based on the location of the school. Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament, if there are plans to revise the free education grant formula and increase grants to schools in remote and maritime areas, so that schools do not spend time on fundraising?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, those concerns were raised during his time when he was in the Education Ministry and they never attended to it. However, we are taking steps by having the Ministry conduct an audit to see the benefits of Free Education Grant utilisation at school level.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his response. The question is from his recent Ministry's Annual Report - Recommendation No. 13. Is the honourable Minister considering increasing the per student boarding grant from the current \$50 to meet the high cost of living over a school term, especially in the rural and maritime boarding schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I do not have the details of what he is saying, but I can recall that such assistance from Government has been increased from 2024 as to \$50 per term for boarding grants.

Inventory for Woodlots Suitable for Logging  
(Question No. 282/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry inform Parliament if the Ministry has plans to evaluate and provide inventories for all woodlots that have potential and are suitable for logging purposes?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Firstly, allow me to clarify what a forest woodlot is in the Fijian context. A woodlot is a small area of land where trees are intentionally planted and managed to provide timber, firewood or other forest products for families, schools, communities or landowning units.

In Fiji, woodlots predominantly planted with exotic species, such as pine and mahogany are established to reduce pressure on natural forests, support community needs, and promote sustainable land use. With respect to evaluating individual woodlots, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to advise that the Ministry does not currently have plans to carry out a nationwide, standalone inventory of every woodlot in Fiji. What we do have is an established process whereby landowners or woodlot owners may request a specific inventory from the Ministry. These assessments are conducted at cost, depending on the size of the woodlot. Such inventories have already been undertaken for some pine and mahogany woodlots upon request.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is now mandatory for all harvesting licence applications, whether in natural forests or woodlots, to include a pre-harvest inventory. This ensures an accurate estimation of volume and value, protecting the interests of both landowners and harvesting companies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also acknowledges the significant contribution of communities, *mataqali*, *tokatoka*, farmers and individuals in establishing woodlots across Fiji, through the initiative such as the 30 Million Trees in 15 Years project.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that national level forest inventories traditionally focus on natural forests and are undertaken approximately every ten years to assess the standing stock of log-gable native species. In addition to this, the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited also conducts its own inventories for mahogany, while Fiji Pine Limited undertakes inventories for pine areas under its management.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the concise response. My supplementary question, is there any plan in the Ministry are there any plans in the ministry to develop a national forest inventory for Fiji for the benefit of the landowners and potential investors?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to-date four national forest inventories have been completed. Firstly, in 1969, Fiji's first forest inventory focused primarily on assessing commercially available timber within our natural forests. In 1991, the second national forest inventory was conducted in partnership with the Government of Germany and expanded its scope to include forest functions, densities, species composition alongside commercial potential.

Another national forest inventory was conducted in 2006. This continued to emphasise commercial timber availability but introduced parameter changes that affected comparability with early inventories. The fourth national forest inventory was undertaken in 2021 and is the most comprehensive inventory to-date. It includes forest carbon measurements, biodiversity assessments and now also captures woodlots. The national forest inventory records all species present, providing stocking rates and volume per hectare at district and provincial levels. I must emphasise that the national forest inventory operates on statistical sampling, not on a hundred percent enumeration of every forest or woodlot.

Before I take my seat, I would like to wish all primary schools in Fiji that will be participating in the Tuckers Athletics Competition from tomorrow - all the very best.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I understand the woodlots are sometimes not very large in nature, but in the licencing process for the removal or the logging of those woodlots, are one of the conditions that whoever removes it must also replant?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes that is correct. We encourage replanting of trees through our reforestation of degraded forest programme.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- I think this is a very important question brought to Parliament. The honourable Minister mentioned that the woodlots obviously provide timber for building and construction purposes. Just a little background, termite is on the rise and one day it will be across Fiji. What is the point of having timber that is untreated, and it is a risk to any or every Fijian? In going forward, for the timber that comes out from here, is the Ministry going to look into ensuring that treated timber is being sold in Fiji?

There has been an incident, and I declare my interest because when I got the Government grant and built my farm, I had bought treated timber, but it was actually untreated timber, and it was infested by termites. The fact is that there are players in the market who are selling untreated timber at the price of treated timber. In going forward, honourable Minister, is the Ministry going to look into this, ensuring that Fijians do not face this?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is something that the Ministry has taken seriously and our officers within the various divisions have been advised to advise those who have woodlots and who have forest plantations on the importance of treating timber, should they

want to construct their homes anytime in the future.

TELS Recipients – Increase in Loan Amount  
(Question No. 283/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament of the reasons why TELS recipients are now facing an increase in the amount owed compared to what they initially signed off on?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think there are some discrepancies in this question in trying to compare TELTS, TELS and TSLS. One is regarding loans, which the students are mandated to pay, and this new one is a TSLS, which is a scholarship scheme. There is quite a big difference in terms of talking about amount owed. As compared to the previous one, amount is owed because they have to pay the loan. As compared to this one, this is a scholarship, Sir, and students are not supposed to pay any loan unless they have breached their condition where after graduation they are bonded. They have to work for a certain period of time and if they do not work for that certain period of time, then of course there is a fee, a penalty which they have to pay to TSLS for breaching that condition of scholarship.

That is something I just wanted to clarify, Mr. Speaker. We have to compare apples with apples, and not apples with mangoes. It is a clarity that needed to be made, because as it is, it is assumed that on the TSLS scholarship scheme, the students still have to pay. No, the students are expected to work after their graduation because that is the intention. Government is funding the students, so the students are qualified to work, just like honourable Ketan Lal. He was one of the beneficiaries, whether he paid off his loan or not, or not a beneficiary, I might need to be corrected.

(Laughter)

HON. K.K. LAL.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Standing Order 60 – Relevance, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I was never a recipient of TELS. Please get your facts correct.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, can you withdraw that statement?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I withdraw the statement. He was a recipient of TSLS scholarship.

Sir, that is just a clarification that I just wanted to make because the Coalition Government in 2023-2024 National Budget announced the TELS debt write off for all the students in Fiji. This brought about much relief to 53,725 students, with an investment or loan balance of \$650 million, where the TELS recipient, parents and guardians will no longer have to pay a single cent back to the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of monetary payback, the students are required to serve the country through paid employment, whether in Government or in the private sector. The bond period will be determined through the years of study, multiplied by 1.5. This may vary for different schemes, depending on the required years of bond service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the former TELS recipient had the provision to pay off their loans. There was an Accelerated Repayment Incentive or ARI, which allowed a maximum of 50 percent discount on a total loan, depending on how soon they can pay off. This means a graduate would have to pay 50 percent of a total loan and obtain full clearance if they wish to leave our shores. However, this only benefitted those who had available funds and capability to pay within two to three years after graduation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given loans are converted to bonds, a graduate who does not wish to service required to pay a full amount invested in lieu, plus a 50 percent penalty. The current system benefits those who do not wish to leave the country, as they will continue to provide service with no payment required. Those intending to leave the country are required to pay the total investment value, plus applicable additional penalty fee, the years of bond services provided. This was done to mitigate the high number of migration cases and get a maximum return on the investment done on the students. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact is and should remain that the Government is investing in the student to provide service to our beloved country and help to fill in the skills gap locally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2024-2025 National Budget, a penalty of 50 percent on non-served bond period was reinstated. If graduates do not wish to fully serve their bond period and pay off the remaining obligation to serve, then a penalty will be applied on the non-served bond on top of apportioned investment amount. The penalty on non-served bond period is based on national interest and to get maximum return on the investment of Government for the students.

The Scholarship Scheme are structured to have consistent supply of skillset in the country. The penalty for not serving the bond helps in mitigating loss of skilled and professional workers for greener pastures. The rate of penalty charged is dependent on years of bond service remaining. The lower the years of remaining bond service, the lower the penalty is charged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, TSLS uses nine categories of penalty to determine the final amount to be paid to unserved bonds, and this ranges from 10 percent to 50 percent and these are available online. The nine categories of penalty were endorsed and announced through the recommendations of TSLS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure fair and just treatment, a progressive penalty approach is used so that those with higher unserved bond periods are required to pay higher penalty of up to 50 percent in lieu of bond service. Therefore, the higher your service to the country, the lower penalty is charged. Of course, those who have fully serve their bond are free of any bond obligation.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform those students who may have fully served their bond service to liaise with TSLS through the online TSLS Travel and Bond Clearance/Repayment Portal and obtain full bond clearance in case you have not done so.

I would like to, again, inform the honourable Members that graduates are only required to provide service to the country as per their bond conditions. They are only required to pay when they wish to migrate or work overseas, therefore, it is only fair that they be required to unserved bond. The penalty as we are training our graduates to contribute to Fiji's economy and not for overseas markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to advise the honourable Members that the Coalition Government will work with TSLS in strengthening the policies to ensure transparent and accountable management of Government funding. There is maximum return from taxpayers' investments in the education sector.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he seems to confuse me more than what I had understood before. Unfortunately, I live in Nadi, and a lot of students who receive assistance through TELS end up at my doorstep for my assistance. When they signed up, they signed up for a certain amount for the period that they attended universities. When they turn up at the border, they are told that this amount is still owed which is different from the initial amount that they had signed up for. So, I had to do some homework, run to FRCS and then to Higher Education Unit to try and clarify. However, it seems that they are confused. They do not even know, why? For example, someone who had owed \$10,000 was asked to pay between \$15,000 and \$20,000. That is the unfair, and that is why I have raised the questions here.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the honourable Member could provide details of the student because I think there is confusion between serving of the bond period that could result in some penalties. If the honourable member could provide the details for us to verify and cross-check.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to clarify this bit, the initial signing agreement had no interest, but this student said that they have been charged 40 percent interest, and imagine paying \$30,000 in interest for a \$50,000 loan. I will forward the email to the honourable Minister.

Honourable Minister, what changes authorised the addition in interest to the student loans, and how do you ensure that these interests do not disproportionately affect those low-income graduates or those with irregular work history?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the honourable Member could provide the details of his questions because there is no interest charged to those who are currently serving bonds.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Sharma, you were to provide more details and I think you were referring to a particular case in which the interest was not mentioned in the initial agreement, and neither was it applicable, so it is silent. That is the issue the honourable Minister was wanting to know. If we can get clarification on that, it may be useful for you to revisit it. Is that possible, honourable Minister?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Minister for his answer. Just a clarification, if I am a graduate and was a recipient of a scholarship, if I am not able to secure a job in Fiji but wanted to go for the PALM Scheme for six months or one year, do I still need to pay a certain amount of penalty, or I can go, serve overseas and then come back under the PALM Scheme? What is the criteria and what is the policy with regards to the PALM Scheme if a graduate wants to go overseas?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- There are considerations available at TELS in terms of the details. I think you can access the TELS online portal, or you can visit the TELS Office in Nadi or Suva to get pertinent answers to questions that you have.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I need clarification from the honourable Minister. If a student does not meet the cut-off mark in the first attempt for a certain programme, and that particular student decides to repeat in order to get the required mark for the programme, so for those who repeat, is there the same cut-off for the scholarship, compared to those who attempt the first time, or is there a different criterion for that?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I think the criteria set by the TSLS is very inclusive. It caters for the first-time students and also those repeat students with special considerations in terms of marks. It is all in the handbook and it is available online.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my intention is not to confuse more on this subject matter, but to talk about TSLS. There was some allocation to TSLS to engage agencies to support staff for visa application. Can the honourable Minister inform this august House whether any agency has been engaged and how many students have been assisted in terms of visa applications?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been having discussions with the honourable Member every day, during tea time, he never raises questions with me.

(Laughter)

If he had raised it with me, I could have brought the answers, because I need to get information from TSLS in terms of what the honourable Member said in terms of visa applications for staff.

MR. SPEAKER.- Do you have a follow-up question, honourable Bala?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Not really a follow-up, but I will discuss with him during lunch time.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Honourable Minister, can you confirm whether students were consulted or even informed before these increases or penalties were applied through their TLTS account?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, consultation has always been part of the budgeting process, during your time and our time. So, this is all part of the budget process and consultation has always been part of it.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Has the Ministry conducted an impact assessment on how these sudden increases in penalty will affect students ability to repay or their future financial stability?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think his questions are coming from the air he generated. However, in terms of the end result, we will request for an assessment done in terms of the viability of the options that have been taken but for now, it is very viable.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will now break for lunch but before we do, I just recalled that my first appointment to the Crown Law Office as it then was, was a bondsman, and being bondsman, you are responsible for chasing after the delinquents who have not been able to pay their loan back. At that time, there were only a few of them. However, behind their back, are the guarantors and they are the ones I normally end up chasing because the others could not find a job, or they are elsewhere. Unfortunately, I found out that the guarantors were the parents, who were also in a difficult position to pay. So, I do not know where the system has gone but it worked a bit in our days, but it looks like it is more complicated now from what I have heard.

Honourable Members, we have had a very useful discussion this morning, so thank you, honourable Minister. At this point, we will suspend our proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

Status of Na Vualiku Tourism Development Programme  
(Question No. 284/2025)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the status of the Na Vualiku Tourism Development Programme for Vanua Levu, including its readiness for implementation and any key components planned for the near future?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with your permission, let me just share with this House a development that should make us all proud.

At the 36th Meeting of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Asia/Pacific Air Navigation Planning and Implementation Regional Group, known as APANPIRG36, held in Bangkok from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26th November ,2025, Ms. Theresa Levestam, Chief Executive Officer of Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji, was elected Chairperson of APANPIRG. This historic appointment makes her the first woman to lead the group, and only the second Pacific Islander to hold the role, following fellow Fijian, Mr. Jone Koroitamana, who previously served as Chair from 1992 to 1998.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, APANPIRG is ICAO's key regional body responsible for reviewing and updating the Asia/Pacific Regional Air Navigation Plan, monitoring implementation, addressing operational and infrastructure deficiencies, and driving initiatives, such as performance-based navigation, seamless air traffic management and regional safety improvements.

For Fiji and the wider Pacific, APANPIRG is especially important as it provides a forum where the unique needs of Small Island Developing States - long overwater routes, dispersed island communities, vulnerability to environmental and economic shocks, are directly reflected in regional planning, while also ensuring that the Pacific airspace remains safe, resilient and well-integrated into wider Asia-Pacific air traffic networks.

Ms. Theresa is from Motusa in Rotuma, Sir. Na Vualiku Fiji Tourism Development Programme of Vanua Levu represents far more than a series of projects. It is a promise to the people of Vanua Levu that the future of tourism will be strong, inclusive and rooted in the spirit of our communities.

Today, I would like to present a brief update on some of the recent activities under the Na Vualiku Fiji Tourism Development Programme. It is not a question of implementation readiness, but rather we are already implementing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members will appreciate that the Programme was launched by the honourable Prime Minister just over a year ago, on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2024, and since that time, I am happy to report that we have established a Central Project Management Unit at the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation which is now fully staffed and operational.

Airport Fiji and Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), which are also implementing agencies under this Programme, have also set up Project Implementation Units to oversee their respective components of the Programme.

As this august House would be aware, the Programme is designed into three phases:

- (1) Phase I lays the foundation for sustainable tourism by addressing barriers such as insufficient or inadequate infrastructure, limited essential services, and weak institutional coordination. It includes airport and road improvements and basic services, support for tourism MSMEs, access to finance for community-based tourism operators, capacity building and institutional strengthening.
- (2) Phase II will promote medium-scale investments based on feasibility studies carried out under Phase 1.
- (3) Phase III will aim to consolidate progress through large-scale investments, policy reforms and sustainable financing, delivering long-term outcomes such as improved connectivity, increased tourism revenue and employment, and comprehensive benefits to local communities in Vanua Levu.

With that background, Mr. Speaker, Sir, permit me to highlight some of what has been achieved in the roughly 14 months since the Programme was launched:

- (1) A Design and Supervision contract was awarded by FRA in May 2025 to prepare the upgrades to be carried out on the Labasa-Savusavu link roads. The planned improvements are intended to enhance road safety, resilience, and the overall visitor experience through the design of scenic lookouts, rest stops, and navigational signage, including the approach road to the Waisali Rainforest Reserve.

This design phase is expected to take approximately 11 months, after which, FRA will be moving swiftly to put out a tender for the actual works to be carried out. I really want to emphasise the road safety aspect of these component - there are too many accidents and road fatalities on the Labasa-Savusavu Road and as a result of this Programme, we hope to reduce – if not entirely eliminate – these accidents and fatalities.

- (2) Airports Fiji also awarded into a Design and Supervision contract for upgrades to both, Labasa and Savusavu Airports. Mr. Speaker, honourable Members would be aware of the recent announcement by Airports Fiji of the imminent closure of the Labasa Airport for four weeks to six weeks during February-March 2026 to carry out urgent runway repairs.

This upgrade is a key safety initiative that will protect passengers and airline crew and ensure safe and reliable aircraft operations across the Northern Division. Other activities under Na Vualiku Programme, include upgrades to the infrastructure at both airports, the installation of a Remote Tower Aerodrome Flight Information System, and a feasibility study for a new airport for Vanua Levu.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has recently awarded a contract to an international consulting firm working with local counterparts to develop an Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP) for Vanua Levu. It is a long-term strategic framework that will guide how tourism in Vanua Levu and Taveuni grows in a sustainable, inclusive and resilient manner over the next 25 years.

It aims to translate the Government of Fiji's tourism diversification ambitions into a clear spatial planning and investment roadmap that protects the natural, cultural and social assets, while expanding high-quality tourism opportunities. The plan will integrate and align existing national and sector strategies, set up realistic tourism growth scenarios and market positioning, and define how key destinations such as Savusavu, Labasa, the Natewa Peninsula, and Taveuni, should develop in terms of land use, infrastructure, visitor flows and community participation. In short, it will guide

future investments and inform the design of Phases II and III.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are important initiatives at various stages of implementation under the Na Vualiku Programme in areas such as solid waste and wastewater management, solar energy and improving the cityscape of the towns of Labasa and Savusavu. However, what I am most excited about to share with you is the imminent launch of the MSME and Community-Based Tourism Programme under the Na Vualiku. This stage of the Programme is designed to place our communities at the centre of tourism growth, ensuring that new roads, better airports, and upgraded services translate into real livelihoods, stronger culture, and a shared prosperity.

Tourism succeeds when small operators succeed. It thrives when community groups can welcome visitors to authentic experiences, and when women-led enterprises can grow with dignity and confidence. Sir, MSMEs and CBDs are the heartbeat of inclusive tourism. They create jobs close to home, protect the story of the *vanua*, and unlock talent that too often goes unseen. This programme recognises that many inter-ethnic Fijians have been constrained by limited finance, market access, and compliance barriers. We will change that by meeting people where they are and lifting them to where they deserve to be.

The Na Vualiku moves in coordinated steps:

- (1) We plan destinations for the long-term through the integrated Tourism Master Plan;
- (2) We build and upgrade critical infrastructure and essential services, from airport terminals and cross-island roads to modern waste and wastewater systems, and renewable energy in public facilities; and
- (3) This is our current focus, we activate the MSMEs and CBD programmes so that local entrepreneurs and village-based groups have the capacity and tools and the support to turn opportunities into income.

This sequencing reflects a simple truth; when access improves and destinations are thoughtfully planned, demand arises. The MSME and CBD programmes ensures our people are ready to capture that demand. We are preparing to roll out the MSME and Community-Based Tourism Programme, with official launches scheduled for the 12th and 13th December in Labasa, Savusavu, and Somosomo in Taveuni. These launches will open the application process for grants and support under the programme, inviting communities and enterprises across Vanua Levu and Taveuni to step forward and participate.

The MSMEs and CBD programmes is ready for implementation. The design work is complete. Eligibility criteria, environmental and social safeguards, and the oversight framework have all been agreed. Extensive community consultations in Savusavu, Labasa, and coastal districts have helped us shape the programme to meet local needs and opportunities.

We now move into the application phase. Communities and MSMEs will be invited to submit their Expressions of Interest. Each application will be assessed against published criteria, and successful projects will be supported through grants, training and advisory services. Our commitment is clear: every step will be transparent, and progress will be reported to Parliament and the public.

The next step is clear: we will open applications during the December launches in Labasa, Savusavu, and Taveuni, and we will ensure that every process is transparent and accountable. This is your moment to engage, to innovate, and to lead. Together we can transform Vanua Levu into a model of inclusive and sustainable tourism for the nation.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his update. Honourable Minister, a question regarding the road upgrades. Recent visit, talking about very recent, couple of days ago, the honourable Prime Minister was also in that particular area. The road upgrade, in light of the fact that we are approaching Christmas season, and also in light of the fact of the imminent closure of Labasa Airport, there is a serious upgrade and repair that is required from the Savusavu junction that starts on the road to Labasa and then up to Savusavu. Can we get a time frame on when that is going to commence? It is quite a disaster zone at the moment with respect to getting to Savusavu?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when Labasa closes during that period, we will be flying in through Savusavu. Programmes have been put in place to provide transportation from Savusavu to Labasa. I should be sharing the details over the next couple of days. I would like to make a Ministerial Statement on that because there is no other way in terms of air; it has to be Savusavu.

We will certainly take into account the conditions that you have highlighted to ensure that the transportation between Savusavu and Labasa are seamless and comfortable. It is going to be very challenging. Labasa is a thriving community and reliant a lot on the air services. Closing the airport for four to six weeks would be quite challenging but Fiji Airports Limited and Fiji Link are both up to the challenge. They have programmes in place to make it seamless and painless for our people in Labasa and Savusavu.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, given that Na Vualiku Tourism Development Programme has taken a considerable amount of time to move towards implementation, I understand many of the Members of Parliament here are from Vanua Levu, including myself and the honourable Prime Minister. Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister explain why critical supporting infrastructure in Vanua Levu, particularly in key tourism hubs such as Savusavu remains in poor condition, with deteriorating roads and hospitals that are in urgent need of upgrade? How can the Government justify these delays when Vanua Levu is a strategically important region for tourism growth, economic development and national resilience?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us remember one thing, this is a 10-year programme and funded by the World Bank. The World Bank, for those who know, do things in a manner that is highly structured. It took us about 12 months, even more, to hire the people that we needed for the project. We had to interview people from New York, Europe and all over the place to come to Fiji.

People have said that the World Bank, there can be too much consultation but you are talking about US\$200 million, you want to make sure that it is properly structured. Once that is in place, the execution will flow - I can assure you of that. We have seen projects in the past that were not properly structured but the World Bank when they move, they do it properly. It can be a bit frustrating when you are the implementing agency, but that is the way they do things and we are very confident, over the next 10 years we will see a huge difference in Vanua Levu.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Honourable Minister, with respect to the US\$200 million or so forth amount of dollars that will be spend on this project, currently Savusavu needs urgent upgrade in our hospital - it does not have wheelchairs, there are no lights where the ED patients are waiting. I have seen these with my own eyes and I have reported these to the media as well. Road infrastructure near resorts, honourable Minister, this needs urgent attention.

MR. SPEAKER.- I was going to interject but your Point of Order, honourable Minister.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Standing Order 60(1) – Relevance. Ask a specific question, you are going all over the place. You are asking about roads, hospitals, everything and even the roads, you did not specify which road. You just generalised that all the roads are in a deteriorated condition in Vanua Levu. I just explained \$300 million is with the Chinese Government, a lot of the roads will be upgraded. You need to be specific, but you are just saying that every road in Vanua Levu is deteriorated. What kind of a generalised statement is that? Do not make that kind of statement.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order! I will take the point that was raised by the honourable Minister. I think you keep to the narrow questions that were supposed to be asked. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, do you wish to respond?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, this is tourism and civil aviation. There are many sectors to our economy. What we are doing, the US\$200 million will lift up Vanua Levu in tourism and civil aviation. Other sectors will also join in. It is kind of a catalyst. You grow tourism and civil aviation, the economy grows in Vanua Levu and others will join in. You will see an overall improvement to Vanua Levu driven by tourism and civil aviation.

Modernising Information System and Digital Platforms  
(Question. No. 285/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Information inform Parliament on what steps the Ministry is taking to modernise its information system and strengthening digital platforms so that citizens can easily access Government updates and services in a timely manner?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, good afternoon, and I wish to thank the honourable Member for the question as this is the first question directed to me since I have become Minister for Information, so, thank you. Since taking office, I have prioritised the modernisation of our information systems and strengthening of our digital platforms so that every Fijian can easily access reliable, timely and accurate updates about their Government.

Mr. Speaker, over 80 percent of Fiji are on *Facebook*, and since coming into Office, our Government *Facebook* page alone has grown by an average of 1,000 new followers every month and now stands at almost 300,000 followers. This demonstrates increasing public confidence in our digital platforms. Our mission is simple - if it is not on our official Government platforms, it must be fact-checked. This builds trust in Government information and ensures Fijians can confidently share and repost accurate content.

Now, allow me to outline a few key initiatives in the Ministry, we are:

- upgrading our digital platforms, especially our Government-managed online systems to improve performance, security and accessibility;
- completing a full website upgrade for a cleaner, more user-friendly experience;
- developing a centralised one-stop Government Information Portal; and
- recovering and securing all data from the previously damaged server in the previous government administration and migrating it onto a new modern infrastructure.

In strengthening our social media and multimedia output, we have significantly expanded our digital content. This includes live streams and real-time updates for Parliament sittings, short videos,

infographics and mobile-friendly content for national announcements, a strengthened *YouTube* archive long-form documentation, and reviving our Government *TikTok* and *Instagram* platforms to reach younger Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in reaching our rural and maritime communities, we continue our town hall outreach in partnership with the Fiji Media Association to take Government information beyond Suva and into rural and maritime communities. I wish to acknowledge the hard work of the Ministry of Justice, taking out their services to rural and maritime Fiji, as well as the REACH programme of the Ministry for Women, Children and Social Protection that takes our Government services to the communities. I ask our Ministers to please participate in this very important programme. We have increased our vernacular content, strengthened our radio outreach through the participation of Government officials in radio broadcasting, as well as TV programmes and online engagements. We have improved our distribution of the Government newspapers across provinces using our Government networks. Of course, as our Government increases connectivity throughout Fiji, Government information can be disseminated quicker on digital platforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we are now in the rainy and cyclone season, our Ministry leads the Community Engagement Working Group under the Communications Cluster of the National Disaster Management Council, together with Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) and UNICEF - the last meeting of this group was in 2021. We have now revived it as we are now in the cyclone season. We are working with media partners such as FBC and the NDMO communications offices to roll out disaster preparedness and early warning messages in the languages and mediums our people best understand. This work falls under the Public Service Broadcasting Grant to better serve our people.

We have also strengthened our Media Liaison Officer (MLO) network in Government. Cabinet has endorsed the strengthening of our MLO network across all Ministries to ensure consistent messaging, accurate information, timely public updates, proper staffing and equipment. I wish to thank the Government of the United Kingdom for their ongoing partnership through the UK Government Communications Service (UKGCS), which is supporting training in digital communication, including the effective use of AI and strategies to address misinformation and disinformation online. We now have a dedicated Parliament Communications Team across ministries to ensure that key information presented here in Parliament are shared promptly and meaningfully with the public.

Mr. Speaker, the National Archives which comes under our Ministry has digitized over 60,000 *Girmitiya* immigration records, which will soon be available online. This advances heritage preservation, public access and the modernisation of archival systems.

Finally, we are continuously upskilling our staff to manage modern communication tools and produce high-quality content. We continue partnerships with local and international experts, including our valued collaboration with the UKGCS, which is assisting our Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Defence, and will soon extend to other ministries as well. Together, we have developed a draft Government Communications Handbook for all Media Liaison Officers, and this is not just for government ministries, but also statutory authorities and independent commissions or independent bodies. We will be finalising this, Mr. Speaker, and submit it to Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about, as we are in the 16 days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, we must confront the new frontier of harm facing our people, especially our women and girls, and that is digital violence. Online abuse, cyber harassment, non-consensual sharing of images, coordinated misinformation, and the weaponization of social media have become real threats to the safety, dignity and protection in public life. In this digital era, violence does not require a

physical space to inflict deep emotional, psychological and reputational damage.

As Minister for Information, I reaffirm our commitment to strengthening online safety frameworks, promoting responsible digital citizenship, and working closely with technology partners, civil society, and our communities to ensure that the digital space becomes a space of empowerment, not fear.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to take this opportunity through your Parliament's digital platform to appeal directly to parents and guardians as we enter into the cyclone season. With more rain predicted in the coming weeks, we can expect increased flooding, swollen rivers and rough seas. I urge families across the country, to take extra precautions to keep our children and most vulnerable safe. Ensure they are closely supervised, discourage them from swimming in rivers and flooded waters, and prevent them from playing in flooded areas. Mr. Speaker, simple but vital measures can save lives.

Mr. Speaker, the vision of the Coalition Government remains clear, and that is a well-informed Fiji. These initiatives I have demonstrated demonstrates our commitment to building a modern, efficient and citizen-centred information ecosystem. We are ensuring that every Fijian, whether you are in Suva, Nadi or our most remote maritime communities that they have timely and accurate access to government information.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the comprehensive answer. It has been brought to our attention that the number of people using these government online services has significantly reduced, and this is due to the services not available or portals down. Can the honourable Minister explain this, please?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I am hearing of this. As I had explained, we have seen a huge increase in the number of followers on our *Facebook* page, as well as our *Instagram*, *TikTok* and *X* accounts. The public is engaging and receiving information from our online portals. So, if the honourable Member has statistics or any data to back up what he has asked, I will be very happy to have a look at it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, there was just recently a survey done by the BBC, it was a Media Action Survey. I am just wondering whether our media platforms, in terms of the Ministry were part of that survey or not?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Koya. Yes, this report was just launched this morning, and I did raise with the UK Government as we did not receive an invite. So, I am not fully aware of the contents of that report, but I would certainly like to see. I know our Ministry did not participate, but it was the media outlets outside of the Ministry that were surveyed and yes, it did report that *fijivillage* was a trusted source of information, well not outside of government, but that is what they have found in the survey. We have just dealt with an issue of misinformation earlier this week with *fijivillage*. We have addressed that, and I think that has been put to rest with the Great Council of Chiefs issuing a statement about that issue. But as far as Government is concerned, we did not participate in that survey.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister also inform Parliament how the Ministry ensures that these so-called modernised digital platforms promote transparency and inclusivity, when there has been repeated complaints from citizens that they are being blocked or restricted from commenting on the Fiji Government's *Facebook* page for expressing their views. The evidence is already posted online. Check!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, since coming into office, there have been no restrictions on online content - comments. Of course, if there is vulgarity, if there is any disrespect, we do hide those comments. But as far as public discourse, it is open for people to make comments.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for speaking on strengthening digital platforms and government platforms. What comprehensive safeguard mechanisms is your Ministry establishing with the media outlets for the protection of our journalists from violence, threats and harassment, looking at the recent incident that just happened?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a very good point, honourable Sharma. I do want to take this opportunity to condemn that attack on the senior journalist from FBC outside court the other day. That is not accepted in any form. Of course, I have addressed this with the honourable Minister of Policing, who has made a statement and has assured that he has addressed this with the Commissioner of Police, calling on the Fiji Police Force for more stringent measures in terms of the escort that is provided to our convicted persons as they leave court.

Yes, there have been comments where they have stated that journalists deserve that treatment. There is no acceptance at all of any form of violence against another human being. And I think we need to all condemn that attack, whether it is journalist or member of the public, they need to be safe when they are out in public, especially from those that have come out of court, convicted persons. We have asked the Fiji Police Force to step up their security around them.

MR. SPEAKER.- You are not going to pursue the same line because if she has already said that she is not aware. So, that denies basically what you are trying to assert. Are you going another direction?

HON. K.K. LAL.- A follow-up question, more of appealing to the honourable Minister. Can the honourable Minister provide a platform or an appeal process where citizens who are complaining can directly talk to the Ministry and ask how can they be unblocked or unrestricted?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Firstly, our media team or our news team do monitor comments and when complaints or issues arise from those comments, we do try our best to address it. If it is directed to another Ministry, then we do flag that with other ministries. There is also the Online Safety Commission that have their online reporting, that does not fall under our Ministry, but we do refer them if there is any online harm against the individual. They can also file a complaint with the Fiji Police Force in terms of any other forms of online violence that they are facing.

Fiji's Participation in Regional Disaster Relief Assistance  
(Question No. 286/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on Fiji's participation in the Disaster Relief Assistance in the Region since January 2023?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before I address the principal question, I would like to address an issue that honourable Usamate had raised about Mataso community in Kadavu. Following the devastation caused by *TC Harold* in 2020, the Ministry of Forestry initiated a community-based timber recovery and housing support initiative in Kadavu in direct consultation with the Mataso community.

Commitments made by the previous administration through the Ministry of Forestry included the following:

- (1) Mataso community to supply pine timber from their local resources.
- (2) The Ministry of Forestry to undertake the felling, cutting and ripping of the timber. The Ministry of Forestry would also be responsible for the treatment process, including the provision of chemicals and technical support.
- (3) The community to construct a shed to support further drying and treatment of the timber.
- (4) Upon completion of the full treatment process, all treated timber will be handed over to the community.

All these arrangements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were done verbally without any agreement signed between the parties.

Our team, led by the Commissioner Eastern, will be visiting Kadavu next week, as part of the mission. They will also conduct a site visit to the community to verify the status of the project before finalising any further housing assistance under Scheme 3. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for your patience.

I will now address the principal question to update this august House on the assistance that Fiji has extended to our Pacific neighbours in the area of disaster response since 2023. As global negotiations have concluded recently in Brazil under COP30, we, in the Pacific, are reminded yet, again, that while the world debates, we live the reality. The frequency and intensity of hydrometeorological hazards such as cyclones, floods, and severe storms continue to increase. Fiji has felt this firsthand and so have our Pacific brothers and sisters.

In addition to these climate-driven disasters, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacific Ring of Fire exposes our island nations to geophysical hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis. The 2022 Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai eruption and the devastating Vanuatu earthquake in 2024 are stark reminders of how vulnerable we are as a region. Fiji has a proud and consistent record of standing with our neighbours in their darkest hours. This is not new.

In 2015, following the devastation of *TC Pam*, Fiji deployed a response team to Vanuatu to provide support, relief, and early recovery. In 2020, through the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Fiji sent an engineering platoon to Australia at the height of their catastrophic bushfires, demonstrating that our solidarity extends beyond the Pacific, and more recently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the spirit of Pacific unity remains strong.

When *TC Kevin* and *TC Judy* struck Vanuatu in February 2023, destruction was severe and a state of disaster was declared. In response, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji offered its assistance without hesitation and our offer was accepted. A 56-member response team, including Officials from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Ministry of Information, National Disaster Management Office and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces was deployed. This team repaired damaged schools and public facilities, provided clinical services, supported community outreach, and was embedded with the Vanuatu NDMO to strengthen coordination. Fiji also provided food supplies and water, delivering immediate practical relief.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Gabriel* caused catastrophic damage across New Zealand's North Island, with losses estimated at NZ\$13 billion. Fiji again responded, deploying a 33-member team from the RFMF, NDRMO and the National Fire Authority. They supported rapid response operations, debris clearance, infrastructure repairs, search and rescue, and reinforced the operations of the New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

Following the 2024 earthquake in Vanuatu, which severely affected Port Vila, Fiji deployed a five-member technical team to support advisory and coordination functions for the Vanuatu NDRMO. In addition, the Government of Fiji donated FJ\$1 million to support Vanuatu's recovery. These actions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are not isolated events, they reflect a strategic commitment to the principles of regionalism under the Boe Declaration on Regional Security and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Fiji is not merely a signatory; we are a nation that acts. Fiji's National Disaster Risk Management Office has played a pivotal role in shaping Pacific humanitarian response coordination mechanism, now endorsed by the Disaster Ministers across the region. This framework will guide further regional disaster deployment.

On the domestic front, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recently enacted National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 has strengthened our institutional readiness. A national emergency response team has been established, and 72 personnel across our first responder agencies, civil society and Government have been fully trained and stand ready for deployment at any time.

The Act further provides for the establishment of an international deployment plan, ensuring a structured, coordinated, and timely assistance whenever Fiji is called upon. Additionally, sectoral emergency response teams, especially within the Ministry of Health, are fully prepared for regional deployment during health-related emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, Fiji continues to lead the Pacific by example. We are not a nation that watches from the sidelines, we are not a nation that waits for others to act, we are a nation that responds, a nation that mobilises, and a nation that stands with our neighbours when it matters the most.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management assures this august House that Fiji is ready for its trained personnel, strengthened legislation, and well-established systems to respond swiftly and effectively to any request for assistance from our Pacific neighbours. Fiji will always be a nation that turns solidarity into action and commitment into results.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question is in two parts. Can the honourable Minister inform the House how soon will the Pacific Humanitarian Purpose Coordination Mechanism be ready? Secondly, if it is ready, will this not duplicate the normal bilateral agreements and arrangements that countries already have in terms of responses to disasters?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the supplementary question. The Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism (PResCoM), and its operating guidelines have been endorsed by the Pacific Ministers for Disasters. The next step will be its integration into the standard operating procedures for national disaster management officers across the Pacific. The PResCoM does not replace the bilateral arrangements that countries in the region have with each other in terms of disaster response and assistance. It offers an alternative mechanism for disaster management officers to access support from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), to coordinate regional assistance from assisting countries and organisations.

What usually happens, Mr. Speaker, Sir, during a disaster, countries are inundated with offers of assistance from neighbouring countries and international humanitarian organisations. This places pressure on the disaster management officers and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate and facilitate on top of their responsibilities to respond to the domestic disaster situation. Through

PResCoM, Sir, disaster management officers can then request and delegate SPC to assume this responsibility to coordinate regional and international assistance, on our behalf, in coordination with the respective country's foreign affairs, and this arrangement allows national response agencies to focus fully on managing the crisis on the ground.

Penalties for Drug Offences  
(Question No. 287/2025)

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

Given the increasing incidence of drugs in Fiji, can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General inform Parliament what changes is Government considering on penalties for drug offenses?

MR. SPEAKER.- If I can pre-empt the answer from the Minister for Justice, let me put this into context as my understanding as the Chair, the question is going only to the general policy direction and the approach for the future by the Government. It is not intended, neither should it be, in a way implicating any of the cases that are before the court. That is my understanding.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is how I see we are going to address the question. I thank the honourable Member for the question. Under caveat, recommendations for changes to penalties have been wide ranging, emotional, solicited and unsolicited from a wide range of actors within government and outside government.

If I may start, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just going to the law, section 4 of the Illicit Drugs Control Act 2004 states, and I quote:

“Unlawful Importation Exportation

- (1) Any person who without lawful authority (proof of which lies upon that person) imports or exports an illicit drug commits an offence and is liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$1million or to imprisonment for life or both.
- (2) In any proceedings under this Part, proof of lawful authority lies upon the accused person. “

Section 5 of the Illicit Drugs Control Act 2004 states, and I quote:

“Unlawful Possession, Manufacture, Cultivation and Supply

- (1) Any person who, without local authority -
  - (a) acquires, supplies, possesses, produces, manufactures, cultivates, uses or administers an illicit drug; or
  - (b) engages in any dealings with any other person for the transfer, transport, supply, use, manufacture, offer, sale, import or export of an illicit drug, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$1 million or imprisonment for life or both.”

Any proposed changes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the penalties for drug offence must align with the National Counter Narcotics Strategy 2023-2028 and be grounded in robust and coherent legal framework. We must also take into account Fiji's obligations under international conventions we

have ratified, as well as the financial and operational implications for law enforcement agencies - the Judiciary and Fiji Corrections Service.

Above all, such reform must be crafted with traditional, political and legal mandate for our people, ensuring that they reflect both, our national values and our constitutional responsibilities. The current sentencing guideline may apply across all Acts identified under sections 4 and 5 of the Illicit Drugs Control Act 2004, subject to the relevant provisions of law, considering the mitigating factors, aggravating factors and the sentencing discretion in each individual case.

If I may just outline, these are the categories as it is and we are talking about the strong drugs, not marijuana:

- Category 1 - Up to five grammes, two and a half years to four and a half years imprisonment;
- Category 2 - More than 5 grammes to 250 grammes, three and a half years to 10 years imprisonment;
- Category 3 - More than 250 grammes to 500 grammes, nine years to 16 years imprisonment;
- Category 4 - More than 500 grammes to 1 kilogramme, 15 years to 22 years imprisonment; and
- Category 5 - More than 1 kilogramme, 20 years to life imprisonment.

Sir, that is basically the time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sentencing guidelines exist and with improved training and case law across Judiciary, drug offenders, users and distributors, as well as those involved in the supply chain now know and must begin to appreciate that our Judiciary is applying the law in the manner in which it was intended - to deter, to denounce, to rehabilitate and to punish.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the demographics most affected by drug arrests in Fiji as highlighted in the Strategy are:

- Age group from 18 years to 35 years, this group accounts for 65 percent of drug-related arrests, making it the most significant age category affected.
- Ages 36 years to 55 years, this is the second most affected group, contributing to 29 percent of the arrests.
- Juveniles below 18 years represent 4 percent of the arrests.
- 56 years and older, account for a smaller percentage of arrests.

In terms of ethnicity, the iTaukei community is disproportionately affected, with 80 percent of drug-related arrests in the first half of 2020. In terms of gender, men are predominantly affected, making up 98 percent of the drug-related arrests in the first half of 2020. For employment status, many arrested individuals are either farmers or unemployed. In terms of demographics, highlighting the vulnerability of our young adults, particularly men from iTaukei community to drug-related activities and arrests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, any changes to the penalties must be within the context of the law, and we are following wide public consultations. There is a call for changes to the penalties - more harsh or severe, this Government will respond. We will respond with adequate resourcing, legal framework development, and training for all our people from community-based services, civil servants, government agencies, judiciary, and throughout the law enforcement agencies.

We will also engage with our development and technical partners to ensure that the legislative penalties that we draft improve the safety of our people and our children, whilst also sending a stark warning to everyone who is considering drug use and drug distribution, that our current sentencing standards have been used in recent cases, and will continue to be used by our learned Judiciary. The legal regime aims to improve informality and proportionality in punishing serious drug offenders

Review of FNPf Act & Special Death Benefit Regulations  
(Question No. 288/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on the review of the FNPf Act and Special Death Benefit Regulations?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for the question and provide an update on the review of the Fiji National Provident Fund Act 2011 and the Special Death Benefit Regulations of 2022.

By way of background, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act was enacted and came into effect in November 2011, with the following principal objectives:

- (1) ensure that workers will accumulate savings throughout their working lives to provide income after they cease working;
- (2) improve the operation and governance of FNPf; and
- (3) assist FNPf to explore a fund scheme for Fijian workers overseas.

The Special Death Benefit (SDB) Regulations came into effect on 1st July, 2022, which governs the financial support provided to dependents of FNPf members, upon the members untimely death, specifically outlining the eligibility criteria, premium rates and the process for applying and receiving the benefit.

In October 2025, Cabinet approved the review of the Act and the Regulations, following FNPf's request to undertake a comprehensive review of the Act, aiming at ensuring that the Act remains robust, relevant and effective in safeguarding the interests of its members, and adapting to the evolving economic and social landscape. The Act has not undergone a comprehensive review since its enactment. However, it should be noted that amendments have been made over the years, primarily as budget amendments or as consequential amendments.

The main objectives of the review of the Act are as follows:

- (1) Evaluate the current FNPf legislation in terms of the effectiveness of the current scheme design, efficiency and alignment with the objectives and functions of the Fund.
- (2) Identify the gaps and challenges in the law that may hinder the system's sustainability, accessibility, fairness and effectiveness.
- (3) Assess the impact of the regulatory environment, the Fund's appetite and national capacity to enable the Fund to expand its investment universe.
- (4) Ensure alignment with international best practices while considering local context and assess current law with similar laws in other countries suitable for FNPf and Fiji.

The regulations are integrated into this broader review to ensure consistency and coherence to the overall framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Law Review Committee has been established to formulate the terms of reference for the consultancy firm to undertake the review process. This Committee includes employers and worker representatives, ensuring a balanced, inclusive and credible approach.

The Committee's activities to-date include:

- (i) Public engagements whereby the Committee has conducted public consultation in three major centres - Suva, Lautoka and Labasa, to gather diverse perspectives from our communities.
- (ii) Accepting written submissions.
- (iii) Conducting an online survey which has been promoted across social media platforms to maximize accessibility.
- (iv) Stakeholder engagement whereby the Committee held meetings with key stakeholders, including relevant Government Ministries, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Fiji Commerce and Employees Federation and the unions.

The Fund intends to appoint a consultancy firm, through a competitive process, to assist with the review. The engagement will be structured to ensure rigorous analysis, robust stakeholder input and actionable recommendations. The overall reform exercise is expected to be completed by 2027. This timeline reflects a careful, evidence-based approach that balances thorough analysis with timely delivery. Pursuant to the 28th October Cabinet decision, the outcome of the review, including any Bill and other regulations emanating from the review, will be brought back to Cabinet for its consideration.

Honourable Members, this is a transformative endeavour that seeks to strengthen social protection framework for FNPF members. I call on honourable Members to support the rigorous, inclusive and timely review. Let us work together to deliver a robust, modern Fiji National Provident Fund Act and associated regulations that will benefit the current and future generations of Fijians. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the honourable Minister – when do we expect the review to commence and to complete?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Thank you, honourable Member, for the supplementary question. The Law Review has commenced with the Fund setting up a committee, as I have mentioned already, to undertake public consultations and draft the Terms of Reference for the Consultants to assist with the review process. The Consultants are expected to commence work in April next year and recommendations will be brought back to Cabinet and appropriate approval before drafting of the amended legislation. Sir, we expect the whole exercise to be completed by 2027.

Hosting HSBC IRB Sevens Tournament in Fiji  
(Question No. 303/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament if there are

plans to host a leg of HSBC IRB Sevens Tournament in Fiji next year?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question., but Before I proceed, allow me to share a few acknowledgements. First, I wish to pay my tribute and respect in the passing of Mr. Isimeli Savutini Bose, Corporate Executive, Founder and former Chief Executive Officer of the Ba Provincial Holdings, a position he held for 26 years before stepping down earlier this year. He also served as the first local Director-General and Chief Executive Officer for Ports Authority of Fiji, and was the National Campaign Manager for the Alliance Party in Fiji in the 1970s and 1980s. Mr. Bose was a former Parliamentarian, and served as the Minister for Public Enterprises with the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Government under the leadership of his old boy from QVS, our current Prime Minister, and is often described as a very reserved person.

*Qu sa varogotia ro koto riki na lolo ena ledu Yasana levu o Ba – na Vanua o Marou, ena dela ni yavu o Nadikilagi, Mataqali Cukumotu; vina valevu na veisusu vina. Sa mai va'rogonia na ledu vanua na tuqwaqwa. Sa mai yaga valevu sara na ledra veiqwaravi.* Mr. Isimeli Savutini Bose, may your soul rest in peace. Secondly, I also wish to congratulate Ratu Jone Sovasova as he ascends the chiefly position of the Momolevu na Tui Vitogo and Taukei Sukanacagi. Ratu Jone Sovasova is the eldest son of the late Ratu Jovesa Daurua Sovasova and Adi Nai Sovasova and will be traditionally installed on Friday, 28th November, 2025. He succeeded the late Ratu Williame Ratucale Sovasova who passed away in 2023. *Muru kalougata koto riki na Momolevu na Tui Vitogo. Muru cola balavu, muru cola qwaqwa.*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should all thank the Fiji Rugby Union and congratulate our courageous FIJI Water Flying Fijians for continuing to punch above our weight in the sport of rugby. Fiji has been officially invited to compete in the Inaugural Nations Championship, launching in July 2026. This groundbreaking global tournament is set to redefine international rugby and elevate Fiji onto the world's premier competitive stage every two years. This milestone represents one of the most significant achievements in Fiji rugby history, firmly establishing the nation among the world's elite rugby powers. Fiji joins Japan as an invitational southern hemisphere nation, competing a formidable line-up alongside New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Argentina and the Six Nations giants of England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Wales of the Northern Hemisphere. *Vinaka vakalevu na qito ra cauravou. Vinaka vakalevu na vakarogoi Viti tiko ena veiyasai vuravura.*

Back to the question, Sir. At present, there are no plans for Fiji to host a leg of the HSBC World Rugby Sevens next year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, hosting a leg of the HSBC Sevens Series requires meeting several stringent criteria set by World Rugby, with infrastructure being one of the most critical determining factors. While there is a strong support for Fiji's potential to one day host a tournament, the Fiji Rugby Union is fully aware that our national sporting infrastructure must first be significantly upgraded.

To host a series leg, a country must have a stadium with a minimum seating capacity of 25,000, world-class amenities and professional-grade facilities. Supporting infrastructure required by World Rugby, including appropriate broadcast, security, operational capabilities and proximity to essential services, particularly hospitals and international airports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these requirements highlight the need for continued investment in Fiji's sports infrastructure. As the Government, we are talking to investors, working closely with key stakeholders, and will continue to explore opportunities for future hosting once these foundational requirements are met. Under the new structure of the Nations Championship, every nation will play six cross-hemisphere fixtures. The Northern Hemisphere teams will travel South in July, while the Southern Hemisphere teams, including Fiji, will travel North in November. For Fiji, this guarantees regular, meaningful, world-class Test rugby – a historic first for the nation – but none of Fiji's games

will be played here, for the very same reasons stated above.

In summary, while Fiji has strong global brand recognition in rugby and the passion to host such an event, infrastructure development remains the key priority before any formal bid can be pursued.

HON. J.N. NAND.- I thank the honourable Minister for a very comprehensive answer. Is there any timeframe by which we should be able to, or are we in a position to host such an international tournament?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, we are trying our best. We have been talking to some investors as well, trying to facilitate if we can do that sooner, so that we can enjoy rugby here at home.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think it would be appropriate for me, on behalf of this Parliament, to convey our deepest condolences for the passing of Mr. Isimeli Bose, a former Cabinet Minister and a Member of this Parliament. We convey our deepest condolences to his family and may his soul rest in peace.

### Written Questions

#### Cheating and Malpractice Cases in External Examinations (Question No. 289/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the number of cheating and malpractice cases in external examinations in the last three years (2022, 2023 and 2024)?

<sup>1</sup> HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I table my response.

#### Statistics on District Advisory Councillors (Question No. 290/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the following –

- (a) how many District Advisory Councillors are there and their location per Division; and
- (b) what is their prescribed allowances?

<sup>2</sup> HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 289/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

<sup>2</sup> Reply to Written Question No. 290/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure II.

Unresolved Complaints and Pending Cases  
(Question No. 291/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General update Parliament with respect to the following:

- (a) the total number of unresolved complaints currently before the Legal Practitioners Unit (LPU), together with a breakdown by the year in which each complaint was received; and
- (b) a breakdown of the number of pending cases before the Independent Legal Services Commission (ILSC) as of 30th October 2025?

<sup>3</sup> HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I have the written answer prepared.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that we have two Bills to deal with today. The first Bill will be the Second Reading and the second Bill will be moved under Standing Order 51.

**EDUCATION BILL 2025**

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 85(1), I move:

That the Education Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34/2025), be now read a second time.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I invite the mover of the motion to speak, I remind honourable Members that in accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the debate will focus on the principles and merits of the Bill only.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill before this august House is the Education Bill 2025. It was tabled for First Reading on Friday, 7th November, 2025. It is before this House again for Second Reading today.

As the Minister responsible for education, and also as the Member who introduced the Bill to this august House, I wish to highlight some historical information relating to this Bill. A review of the current Education Act 1966 was undertaken by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Fiji Law Reform Commission, and this mammoth task began in 2024 and concluded early this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the Ministry of Education Act 1966 is warranted because of the need for it to be relevant to the modern education issues and development. The current Act was developed and adopted in 1966. Many provisions may no longer reflect the emerging issues and today's issues relating to education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we received funding assistance for the review from the Global Partnership Education, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 291/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

Australia-Fiji Education Programme (AFEFP). We are indeed grateful to these organisations and platforms for their technical and financial support, as well as their shared commitment to this worthy cause.

The current Act is the foundational law for pre-tertiary education in Fiji, and since its promulgation in 1966, it has only been amended seven times in 1968, 1970, 1975, 1976, 1998, 2009 and 2016. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no comprehensive, full-scope review of the current Act has ever undertaken. It became imperative that such integral legislation be reviewed and reformed to update it to modern standards and best practices, and to also address the since-developed and ever-developing issues and concerns to the education system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to facilitate the review, the Ministry of Education appointed a Review Committee in March last year, led by Ms. Rokobua Naiyaga, a seasoned and well-respected professional educator. Also included in the Review Committee is:

- Mr. David Solvalu, Legal Drafter;
- Ms. Lyanne Vaurasi, Legal Drafter;
- Ms. Magdalene Ramoala, Legal Officer (Fiji Law Reform Commission); and
- Ms. Joyce Hicks, Legal Officer (Fiji Law Reform Commission)

The team was also assisted and supported by staff from the Ministry of Education and the Solicitor-General's Office.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, extensive in-person public consultations and targeted meetings were also conducted to gather valuable insights and feedback on the review of the current Act. The comprehensive chronology of events and various venues across Fiji and engaged in diverse range of stakeholders, such as Government ministries, tertiary entities, school management committees, faith-based organisations, teacher associations, higher education institutions and the general public, including in particular teachers, parents, and children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consultation commenced with the awareness and scoping workshops in Suva in March and at Pacific Harbour in April 2024, followed by targeted meetings with Government ministries and stakeholders again in Suva. Subsequently, a series of public consultations were held in different locations, including Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka, Nadi, Navosa, Sigatoka, Suva, Nasinu, Nausori, Levuka, Taveuni, Savusavu, Bua and Labasa, amongst others.

Also, virtual consultations were conducted to ensure broader participation, including sessions in Rabi, Kadavu, Rotuma and Lau. The Review Committee further engaged with key organisations such as the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Bureau of Statistics, Higher Education Commission and the University of Fiji to gather diverse perspectives and insights. The targeted meetings aimed to enhance collaboration and incorporate industry and regional perspectives into the education policy review process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the valuable feedback gathered from these interactions played a pivotal role in informing the revision and policy direction of the current Act, ensuring that the educational landscape aligns with the aspirations and needs of the Fijian community. The Review Committee organised a validation workshop on 8th and 9th July 2025, bringing together senior officials from the Ministry of Education and key stakeholders to deliberate on the outcomes of the review and the recommendations put forth by the review committee. This session served as a crucial platform for validating the findings, insights and proposed actions derived from the comprehensive review process.

During the workshop, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in-depth discussions were held to assess the alignment of the review committee's recommendations with the overarching goals and priorities of the Ministry of Education. The active participation of key stakeholders facilitated a robust exchange of perspectives, ensuring that diverse viewpoints were considered in the validation of the review outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the extensive feedback from public consultation, written submissions, questionnaires, responses and targeted stakeholder meetings, the Bill was drafted. The Bill was also vetted by the Office of the Solicitor-General for legal implications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 49 features of the Bill seek to repeal the Education Act 1966, Fiji Teachers Registration Act 2008, Higher Education Act 2008, and to replace them with a single comprehensive piece of legislation for education in Fiji. The proposed Bill intends to capture the developments that have occurred in the education space over the span of the last five decades, since the first Act of 1966, to include more diverse forms of learning including digital use. Lessons that address emerging issues, like climate change, financial literacy, and other pertinent subject lessons, as well as having legislation that addresses the environment of teaching and learning, et cetera.

Part of the recommended changes of the Act is proposing the establishment of the National Curriculum and Assessment Authority, including its membership, its functions, powers, and meetings. Currently, curriculums are set by the Permanent Secretary through an internal Ministry unit. Mr. Speaker Sir, a proposed authority will be responsible for advising the Ministry of Education on curriculum, on assessment, and educational standards, and for developing national curriculum frameworks, conducting research, and collaborating with stakeholders. It must publish an annual report on its performance, and members are protected from liability, unless acting in bad faith.

Since the initial Education Act came into law, fundamental changes have also developed in the areas of human rights and child protection. Likewise, on employment laws, they promote safe working spaces. Incidentally, the prohibition of corporate punishment has become a global standards for learning environments, and these laws have been introduced into Fiji. The proposed Bill intends to propose corrective measures to address discipline. The Education Bill looks to counselling and a more targeted curriculum, especially in formative years, as a recommended strategy to establish a well-rounded, respectable, and highly performing student character.

A new feature of the Bill, Mr. Speaker Sir, is that, unlike the current system, schools will be able to conduct fundraising activities for the least of approved purposes. This will allow schools more flexibility in fundraising, provided that fundraising is truly voluntary, and parents are not coerced in any way.

Another new and important feature is that schools will be able to charge levies for specific purposes, including the improvement of infrastructure, maintenance, and to purchase to improve the quality of learning. These, however, will be tightly regulated to ensure that levies are reasonable, equitable, and not excessive or burdensome to parents. Mr. Speaker Sir, financial management, record-keeping, and reporting requirements are outlined, including the need for financial statements to be prepared and audited annually. The accounts and financial statements of the schools must be audited by an authorised auditor, and an annual report must be submitted to the Permanent Secretary.

Part 12 of the Bill outlines the establishment and functions of the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA), and the Fiji Teachers Registration Board (FTRB). The FTRA is properly established as a body corporate with various powers, including the ability to collect fees, to investigate complaints, and produce materials for its functions. Many of the provisions under this Act are retained from the current Fiji Teachers Registration Act 2008, with some key improvements to ensure operational efficiency within the authority. The Board is responsible for registering

qualified teachers, overseeing disciplinary measures, collaborating with relevant stakeholders and developing professional teaching standards and ethics. The Board may delegate its powers, establish committees and appoint a chief executive officer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 13 of the Bill outlines the regulations and requirements for higher education institutions in Fiji. This Part also retains much of the framework under the current Higher Education Act 2008, with key changes to improve operational efficiency such as moving from a two-step to a single-step process of registration. It covers the establishment, registration and accreditation of universities and other higher education institutions, as well as the functions and powers of the Higher Education Commission. It also includes provisions for appeals, financial management, reporting and winding up of institutions.

The Commission has the authority to regulate and oversee higher education institutions to ensure they meet national standards and provide quality education. Part 14 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sets out the general powers of the Minister for Education and the Permanent Secretary. This part allows the Minister to give directions to the Permanent Secretary on how to exercise the powers and functions under the Act. It also clarifies that the Minister is not bound by the advice of the Council but must consult with them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Coalition Government is committed to prioritising education for our children. The Bill proposes reforms that will help improve the education system in this country and ensure that quality education is provided to our children. It is a step in the right direction for everyone concerned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I therefore urge all the honourable Members to vote in support of the motion that is before this august House, so that the Bill can be referred to the appropriate Standing Committee for further scrutiny and supplementary consultations with the people of Fiji.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for the articulation on the Bill. As the Minister said, I think this is a very timely and well-considered, thoughtful approach to consolidating all the different parts, particularly legislations that affect the education system and the honourable Minister is correct, we are looking at the 1966 Act.

Mr. Speaker, a number of reforms have been instituted over the years, some quite radical, some haphazard and I think it has produced a situation where we are now concerned about the quality of education, the framework within which a number of different entities operate. I think, from that point of view, as a matter of principle, this Bill is a very timely one.

I went through the Bill last night, and there were a number of principles that emerge quite forcefully. I want to just point out some of them. Things such as governance, accountability and transparency itself will be dealt with by major national bodies - Education Advisory Council, National Curriculum Assessment Authority, and Teacher Registration. These are governance aspects, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which are very important. It is well consolidated in the Bill.

The second principle that I identified, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the inclusivity and equity, and I know this Bill is also being driven by the discussions at the Denarau Meeting – *Denarau Declaration*. The policy issue paper, we see that the Bill recognised the importance of early childhood education and as you know, in the last budget, we have further recognised the contribution of the early childhood teachers, regularising their salaries, and they are now employed full time. So that is a very important principle of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, inclusivity and equity.

The third principle that comes out very is the idea of holistic and lifelong education. Beyond the traditional school years, I know, it covers mature students. Important one, honourable Minister, that I identified in the Bill is, you know, home schooling, higher education regulation. The principle of aligning curriculum, assessment and learning outcomes and global best practices, in different areas are very, very important. The two final principles that I identified is the alignment with international and national frameworks.

Again, you know, 1966 Act is a very old Act, outdated, and it is not aligned with modern practices, education demands, international treaties, our National Development Plan and that leads us to the fifth principle of the standards of teaching and learning. I know we have had a number of questions and discussions in this Parliament about quality, standards of teaching and learning. I think the Bill, as a matter of principle, strengthens some of those requirements which will enhance learning and teaching in the classroom as well as teacher standards and quality.

The benefits of this Bill, which we call the merits and again, I can identify a number of merits from this Bill, and the honourable Minister alluded to some of them. The first one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is relevance to economic and social development. A more flexible, future-oriented education law must align with the new imperatives of a digital economy, TVET, bridging skills gap, regional and global competitiveness and for Fiji, this is going to be a very defining thing in the future.

Today, in the caucus, for example, we discussed population policy. We discussed the changing labour market needs and what will happen in the next decade in terms of where our people are going to fit in this global, not only national, but global, regional labour market.

I think this Bill actually puts ahead proposals, requirements that would be very relevant to the economic development. Modernisation of legislation, again, it enhances the modernisation, in the context of what we need in enhancing student protection and well-being. I noticed that corporal punishment is included there. It is a very important aspect as well. Improved accountability and quality assurance, as the honourable Minister pointed out, some of the clarity on the powers of the Permanent Secretary, the minister and the advisory bodies is very important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last two merits or the benefits of this Bill is better access and pathways, home schooling, for example, mature students, and higher education, these will be benefits for improved quality of education generally. Of course, resilience and sustainability would be the ultimate merit or the ultimate outcome for our national development and tying it together with the overall objective of improving the quality of life of our people. With those outline of the merits and principles. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the Education Bill 2025, a landmark legislative proposal that seeks to modernise and consolidate the education framework in alignment with Section 31 of the Constitution and our International obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can recall in December 2023, there was an Education Summit, where all educators engaged in discussion, and as a result of that discussion, a later consultation, here we have the Education Bill. This is something that has been discussed also with members of the diaspora, asking what is happening to our children? What is the Government doing in terms of education and this has been relayed to them.

The Bill is a product of extensive consultation, rigorous legal vetting and thoughtful policy refinement. It reflects our national commitment to inclusive, equitable and quality education for all Fijians, regardless of age, ability or background.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill gives effect to the constitutional right to education under section 31 and establishes the legal architecture for:

- (a) early childhood, primary, secondary and higher education;
- (b) technical vocational education and training (TVET);
- (c) special and inclusive education;
- (d) teacher registration, professional standards; and
- (e) institutional governance and accountability.

It repeals the outdated legislation, introduces a unified framework that binds the State and ensures continuity, transparency, and legal clarity across the education sector. Importantly, the Bill establishes a new statutory body while continuing others under a strengthened mandate. This ensures that the Fiji education system is managed by qualified experts, not by chance, but by design.

Among these bodies are:

- (a) Part 4 of the Bill establishes the Education Advisory Council. This will be a multi-stakeholder body chaired by the Permanent Secretary. It will bring together voices from school associations, unions, higher education institutions, civil society and controlling authorities. Its purpose is clear – to advise the Minister on methods of strategy, policy and reform, ensuring that our education system remains responsive and inclusive.
- (b) Part 5 of the Bill introduces the National Curriculum and Assessment Authority. This Authority will be responsible for developing and approving curriculum and assessment standards.

I think, honourable Hem Chand is probably one who is very active in asking questions in relation to education. Your answers are contained here, honourable Member. Importantly, it mandates the thematic areas that reflect our national priorities. These are digital literacy, civic responsibility and the formal learning of both *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and Hindi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we understand the problems that we face in Fiji. Most of our very own children, grandchildren cannot even speak the indigenous language. I was in New Zealand during the Fiji Independence Day, it was during the language week. What struck me is that for more than 10 years they have been emphasising children speaking their *iTaukei* language, or Rotuman or Hindi, for that matter. I think we have to thank the honourable Minister and his team who have contributed to this awesome law that will provide the avenue for children to grasp their identity.

- (c) Part 12 continues the work of the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority. This is very important, which is also a subject matter that honourable Hem Chand normally asks, which is building the Fiji Teachers Registration Board. This Authority will regulate teacher registration, discipline and professional conduct. It also introduces new mechanisms, including provisional registration, a limited authority to teach, ensuring that our teaching workforce is both accountable and adaptable.
- (d) Part 13 strengthens the mandate of the Higher Education Commission. This Commission will regulate registration, accreditation and the oversight of higher education institutions. It will also introduce safeguards on the use of the title ‘university’.

This is a big issue too. A lot of people provide their Curriculum Vitae with a university that does not exist. We are thankful for the Coalition Government for bringing in and looking at this

provision. It also introduced an authorisation to confer awards, protecting the integrity and credibility of the higher education sector.

The Bill also enshrines critical rights and responsibilities:

- (1) Right to education;
- (2) Education for mature students; and
- (3) Compulsory education.

The Bill further strengthens operational and institutional safeguards:

- (1) School registration recognitions (Part 7):
  - (a) establishes clear procedures for registering Government, Government-aided, private and home school.
  - (b) introduces appeal mechanisms and safeguards against the misuse of term 'school'.

In terms of health and safety, inspections covered in Part 8 and Part 11 cover financing and accountability. Part 10 is very important – student behaviour and well-being. It prohibits corporal punishments, mandates counselling services and support.

I urge the community, Provincial Council, *tikina* council, and people of interest to express their views to the Committee when this Bill is deliberated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Education Bill is a transformative legal instrument. It reflects our collective aspirations for a just, inclusive, and forward-looking education system. One that empowers our children, supports our educators, and strengthens our national development. I commend the Bill to the House and invite honourable Members to support its presence in the interest of our people and our future.

MR. SPEAKER.- There are four more speakers on my list. I am looking at the time again unless there is any violent objection. It is my intention to continue without the afternoon break until the items on the Order Paper today are exhausted. Are you in agreement, honourable Members? I hear no objection. That will mean that the Chair will entertain a suspension motion first.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a few speakers and another Bill for debate.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

## RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION BILL 2025

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, allow me to thank the honourable Minister for Education for bringing before this House the Education Bill. The current Act dates back to 1966, and therefore, the effort to modernise our education laws must be acknowledged. This Bill is indeed a step forward in principle, but it must also withstand robust scrutiny. Because education is not merely a policy area, it is the foundation of Fiji's future.

Having said that, I now turn to the merit of the Bill. I read the Bill last night and wish to speak on a few areas. Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the Bill speaks broadly about education fears, there should be a proper definition of special schools. Without a clear definition, implementation will be inconsistent, and many children may be left behind. Consideration should be given to clearly defining special schools, their staff qualifications, standard programmes and funding models.

The right to education must include the right to special and inclusive education. This must be recognised as a co-educational right, not as an afterthought. Consideration should be given to incorporating special education into the fundamental education rights outlined in the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Early Childhood Education is an important area. There should be a representation of the head of the Early Childhood Education Association on the Advisory Council. Early Childhood is the most critical stage of learning. Consideration should be given to ensuring that this sector is properly represented in decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the proposed advisory bodies appear dominated by Government appointees. Consideration should be given to teachers, school managements and parents as they have a real voice and not merely a token representation.

The key tertiary institutions such as Fiji National University and the University of the South Pacific should be included or recognised within the framework of this Bill. These institutions save our workforce, research capability and our national innovation capacity. Consideration should be given to ensuring these institutions are properly acknowledged within the National Education System. Furthermore, States should be independent and not placed under FNU. Technical education requires its own governance structure, identity and budgetary support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at present, teacher training institutions appear unrepresented. Consideration should be given to mandating at least two representatives from teacher training providers. There is no clear position regarding the fee structure for foreign students. This creates administrative uncertainty and may lead to disputes. The TSLS is entirely missing from this Bill despite governing access to higher education for thousands of Fijian students. Consideration should be given to recognising TSLS within the legislative framework.

In conclusion, I do not stand to reject this Bill, I have a few specific recommendations, and I will ensure that I appear before the Committee to give my submissions. I say let us improve it. Let us amend it. Let us build not just a legal framework, but a lasting legacy. Let us ensure that it honours the Constitution, the legacy of community participation, the right of every child, especially the weakest amongst us.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this Education Bill that is before this House and I do so with a very clear conscience. We cannot reform education in Fiji by weakening the very people who built it. I must declare my interest as I am also a School Manager of Baulevu High School.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us not forget that 96 percent of our schools, ECE, primary and secondary are managed by community and faith-based organisations. These organisations build schools when Government resources were thin. They kept education alive in rural and maritime communities. They supported teachers long before the Ministry had a structured system. They are not outsiders. They are not optional partners. They are the heart and bones of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for decades, they have provided classrooms and infrastructure, disciplines and values, support for teachers and students, and equal access for poor and rural families. Now, we see attempts to centralise decision-making. We see policies that push communities to the side. We see legislation that is reducing their voice instead of strengthening it. This is not progress. This is discontinuity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, holistic education does not come from a Suva boardroom, they come from a community outside - cultural values, faith-based principles, and the everyday reality of our families. When management is ignored, children suffer. When communities are pushed out, schools lose their identity.

The Government talks about SDG4: Quality and Inclusive Education, but who makes inclusion happen on the ground? Not the Ministry, not headquarters, it is the community! It is the community who keeps remote schools functioning, who support teachers when resources are limited, who takes children with disabilities and who oblige parents to keep students in school. If we weaken them, we weaken our chance of achieving SDG4.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call for the Bill to:

- (1) Respect community ownership of schools;
- (2) Guarantee management a strong role in governance and decision-making;
- (3) Protect teachers' moral and restore confidence;
- (4) Support rural and maritime, and special need students; and
- (5) Provide leadership training for management and school heads.

These are the reforms that will truly lift the education system.

To conclude, the school management have carried this nation's education system for generations – often quietly, often without resources, often without recognition, but always faithfully. They deserve respect, not rigorous authority. They deserve partnership, not sidelining. They deserve legislation that strengthens their contribution, not weaken them. We stand firmly with the school management of Fiji. We will continue to educate the educational system built on genuine partnership, strong community engagement, and respect for the people who have saved Fiji's educational journey for over a century.

MR. SPEAKER.- Just a reminder to keep this straight and narrow under the relevant Standing Order which we are looking at, that is, Standing Order 85.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and as you said, I will try to keep to the straight and narrow - just look at the principles and the merits of the Bill. First of all, I would like to congratulate the honourable Minister and the Ministry for the work that they have done. It is very important, and I think if there is one thing that we realise, it is the greatest investment that we can have in the future of our country, it is education. Not only of our young, but for all of us. It always needs a systemic approach – having a big way of trying to review it involving everyone, as many people as possible, the stakeholders, I think, has been a great approach.

I am just looking at some of the principles that I can see that are embedded in this new Bill. One is the principle of inclusion. I think, if I look at the way that it has been structured, it is trying to include everyone that has a stake in education to be included somewhat, and you see this in the establishment of the various forums that are there. The way that they are looking at the curriculum now is not just limited to teachers, but a wider variety of people.

You know now, when you look at intelligence generally in the world, it is not just knowing your ABCs and your one, two, three - there is social intelligence, there is emotional intelligence. All of these other things are factoring in. One of the things that you see, for instance, in the countries now, people may know how to do it, but either they cannot do it, or they do not want to do it. So, in the education thing, when you have experts that come from different areas, they can bring all that systemic thinking about curriculum into play in the way that it is done. So, I think the idea of inclusion is a very strong principle of this Bill.

The other thing that I can see is that it is trying the other principle of alignment with the things that have happened in the world over the past years; alignment also with our constitution. In our constitution now, we have various bills of rights, and one that comes very strongly through here, that I read is the right of the child to education. In the existing Act, it says, you educate according to the parent's wishes. That is section 3 of the existing Act. This particular one takes that out. It is just saying, "you the child have these rights, you have the right to education and it requires, I am just wondering in my mind, what happens to the parent's wishes. That is an interesting point to think about. It is about amalgamating also with the developments that have taken place around the world. We are talking about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Constitution, here as it has been expressed by the honourable Biman Prasad, things that have happened in terms of OHS, employment relations, all of these things have been amalgamated into this.

One issue that I have a bit of a question mark is this idea of amalgamation of the other legislations that are around the Education Act. This is a legislation on the Higher Education Act, the Fiji Teachers Registration Act, to all come into this one. There are pros and cons of both. One of the things that we had in the Standing Committee for Justice, Law and Human Rights, we were looking at some of the electoral laws. What they were talking about, it was to keep the law separate because if they want to change something, they can just change that particular component of that law rather than the big legislation. However, I can also see the merits of putting everything together in one, that you can have that coherence between the different parts of it. So that is one of the things that I picked up from that.

I will not try to touch too much on the various things that have already been covered by other speakers. One of the things that I was thinking about when the honourable Minister was talking, he was talking about fundraising is not compulsory, but levies will be allowed. Then to my mind, I am trying to gather this thing in my head. Fundraising is not compulsory, levying then becomes compulsory if it is there. How does that affect the right to free education when there is some compulsion on to do with the levies? This is the thing that I am thinking now in terms of principles and merits.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other things, recently on Remembrance Day, I joined the former British soldiers at their British Legion Centre. One of the things that we were talking with them, I have also joined the Children of the 212; these are the original British Army from Fiji that went in the 1960s.

One of the things they pointed out, a lot of these people come back from the British Army, they have a lot of expertise, but they cannot get into the job markets because they do not have the Masters and the PhDs. So, I am just thinking, when you do this programme, how do we give

recognition to those abilities? Because most of our people here in Fiji, they just ask you, “you got a PhD or Masters?” - they take you. But you know, sometimes you get these people with the big degrees, they cannot do the job, whereas these people, they have done that. So, I am hoping that when we have this the curriculum development, and maybe the higher education, when they look at qualifications, they can weave this into what they recognise as MQR.

People might not have all those things, but they have the ability. Because some of these people have served the British Army for 20 years, or even 22 years. They come, they are here, a lot of them are not able to get into employment. So, I am hoping that that is one thing that we can try to address.

The other thing that I like about this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, right at the very end, it requires a process of continual improvement. Right at the very end, it calls for a mandatory review every five years. I think this is a very good principle. It builds in the requirement for continuous improvements, and we look forward, when the Bill comes out, and we have the Committees, this will be an opportunity to be able to look into these principles and merits and go deeper into the different clauses of the Bill.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try to be very brief, and I do join the previous speakers in acknowledging Government through the honourable Minister for this very important Bill. As we all agree, this is, as stated by the honourable Usamate, perhaps one of the greatest investments that any country can put its resources into, given its importance and how it contributes to our growth and development. Thank you once again, honourable Minister.

Just returning from COP30, I noted the events that were recently being held in the country as well, and one that caught my attention was the Topex Meeting that was held recently. Something that caught my attention was the statement made by the Permanent Secretary for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations. In his address, he highlighted the fact that Fiji needs a major reset to fix its skills shortage, and I hope that this will be part of it, because as the honourable Professor Biman Prasad is fully aware, we have always discussed about skills and the economy, and the gaps because we have progressed a lot since 1966.

When looking at the merits of the Bill, I will not go into the principles, once again. I only focussed on two areas very quickly - Part 5 and Part 6 on the Curriculum Development and Assessment and on the types of schools ensuring that no one is left behind and giving people the second chance to education. The Curriculum Development is always very important, and it needs to be relevant and applicable, because this is part of change management. If we do not manage change well, we will always be reactive or we will find ourselves struggling because we will not fit strategically within the context of the developments that are happening.

I like the fact that the Bill highlights that in addition to the standard subjects taught in Fiji, there is also consideration to cover the other additional thematic areas, like digital literacy, technology is a key influence for change, artificial intelligence, civic responsibility, morality and discipline. It is very important for us as we know that there are some of our students who come from broken families with unfortunate upbringing/background, perhaps the school can provide that safe space for our students. Health and nutrition, physical education and sports, we all agree that not everyone will excel academically, but we have our children with special skills and talents, and this can be developed so that it can provide a livelihood for them. This is in addition to the current TVET programmes, will be very helpful for our people.

The honourable Usamate has talked about the issue of returning ex-servicemen. I think it is not only for them, but as educators like honourable Professor Biman Prasad would know, this is about modern learning environment, adult learning environment. I think the issue that he is raising is about

Recognition of Prior Competencies (RPC) and the Recognition of Prior Skills learning. I think if these two can be factored in, the military uses very well, because certain levels of courses that you do is recognised when you go for further training.

You are exempted from doing other units in the universities or whatever when you get into staff college because of recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competencies. Perhaps, it is already in existence in some areas of education, but I think it needs to be standardized. And of course, with the right processes and systems in place, this should really help because as he has stated, people can do the work but, unfortunately, they miss out because they do not have the qualification. If Recognition of Prior Competencies and Recognition of Prior Learning is factored into this, it will really do a lot of favour to those who need to be considered in this regard.

On the classification of schools, there is only one question mark that I am raising when it comes to home schools, particularly when it comes to some faith-based, is it beliefs or some cults where this home school environment – back to Part 5, a registered school and a recognised school must meet the curriculum and assessment and educational set, but this is a fact. We have had experiences where children are not allowed to go to school, and they create this home-learning environment. This is probably something that the Committee will need to consider seriously when it comes to the consultations. I know that there are some certain beliefs that do not want to send their children to any school, but they have this homeschooling environment that they have created for themselves. That is something I wanted to raise from Part 6 of this Bill.

I thank the Government and the honourable Minister for referring this again to the Committee. Hopefully, with their consultations, they will probably come up with some of the things that we do not recognise as yet and taking into consideration the views of our various stakeholders as well. I thank Government again for this Bill, and we look forward to it going through the process and look forward to the report that will be submitted to this House later on in the Third Reading by the Committee responsible.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I appreciate you giving me this time. It would be remiss of me as a child advocate not to make a contribution to this very important Bill. It is a landmark piece of legislation that modernises our education system, strengthens accountability, as has been mentioned by my previous colleagues, and places the rights and well-being of the Fijian child in the centre of national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I make a short contribution of what may not have been covered, I wanted to address some of the issues that have been raised by the honourable Members from the other side. Honourable Usamate mentioned about the possible removal of parents' wishes, it might be watered down. The way I see this Bill, it does support parents and strengthens partnership with families.

This Bill recognises that education is a partnership between the State, the schools and families. It honours parents as primary educators of their children. It protects their rights to choose their child's school, to consent to religious instruction, and to apply for homeschool education where it is in the child's best interest, as well as participate meaningfully in school governance through the Education Advisory Council.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition raised the issue about possibly where some religions do not allow their children to go to school. There is a huge change and that is being proposed in this Bill, and that is education is compulsory. It does recognise that with the constitutional right to free education, comes the responsibility that your children must attend school, and that it is compulsory.

So, they do go together, that is a balanced approach that we need to embrace in this House. I think it is a principle that we need to continue to support as we provide free education for our children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue I wish to elaborate is that it is a huge change or a shift in protecting our children and elevating their well-being. One of the strongest features of this Bill is its child protection framework. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it defines corporal punishment as violence, and so corporal punishment as explicitly stated in this Bill that it is prohibited in all schools. That is a very strong feature of this Bill, and it is a principle we should support. There is a lot of chatter and discussion about this issue where there are adults pushing for corporal punishment to be legalised in schools.

Again, we need to look at this and approach it from where the primary educators and the primary disciplinarians are parents and families. We cannot expect our teachers to be the primary disciplinarians of our children. That is not their role, their role is to teach and educate and we cannot shift that burden to them to be the disciplinarians as well. This is like shifting your own parental responsibility to the teachers. This Bill demands that this should shift back. This should be done by families and parents.

We just need to question, if it is illegal or a crime to hit an adult, then why not a child, even if it is in a school? So why would we allow hitting, allow corporal punishment in schools when it is a crime to hit an adult? That is fair and that is the right thing to do. That is what this Bill encompasses.

Mr. Speaker, our children must be treated with dignity and respect at all times. The access to counselling services is now made mandatory. It is now a requirement, ensuring emotional and mental support for students. Again, a huge shift to the rights of the child on the need for their mental health and the provision of counselling services in our schools. The best interest of the child is a primary consideration in all decisions. This is in line with global best practices to ensure that our classrooms are safe, nurturing environments where children can thrive.

In conclusion, Education Bill 2025 is bold, forward-looking and grounded in the best interests of our children, and most importantly, ensures that no child is left behind, whether in our urban centres, our rural villages or maritime communities.

I just wish to address the concern by honourable Vijay Nath about committee-run schools. Mr. Speaker, I think just this morning they raised the issue again about a committee-run school imposing a levy and the Ministry of Education stepping in and says, “no, it is voluntary.” So, we do need this balanced approach where the Ministry of Education has this authority to be able to keep committee-run schools in line so that there is best practices and that we are not putting a huge burden on families when it comes to their children.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill reflects who we are as a nation and the future we want for our children. I wish to commend the Ministry, as well as the Education Review Committee, which is ably led by my former principal at Adi Cakobau School, Ms. Rokobua Naiyaga who I wish to acknowledge. I congratulate her and her team for this Bill and all those who contributed to this important reform. I support the Education Bill.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to thank every Member who contributed in support of the Bill, discussing the merits and the principles of the Bill. Some have touched a little bit about the contents. Those contents can be further discussed, and we encourage your input, your submissions at the Parliamentary Standing Committee level. I am sure that you will get justifications, clarifications on the issues that you raised.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Education Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34/2025) referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights]

### **ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025**

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

That the -

- (a) Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 39 of 2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage of a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Monday, 1st December 2025, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Minister moving the motion.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I rise to update this august House on the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025, which has been endorsed by Cabinet and is now being tabled for its First Reading under Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Environment Management Act 2005 has served Fiji for 20 years. However, it was designed at a time when environmental legislation focused largely on administrative processes without the pressures we face today, that being rapid development, expanding urban growth, climate impacts, complex waste streams and increasing illegal activities.

Over the years, Fiji has witnessed legal disputes, ambiguous responsibilities, slow approval processes, and limited enforcement powers. The current legislation does not provide adequate tools to deal with illegal developments in a rapid manner, nor does it provide us with adequate responsibilities to respond immediately to pollution risk or environmental emergencies. It also does not support the digital transformation underway across Government.

The Bill before us responds to those gaps. It is a comprehensive, modern and accountable framework aligned with the contemporary environmental governance, national development priorities, and the rollout of the Building Permit Approval System (BPAS), as alluded to by the honourable Minister for Finance this morning when he delivered his Ministerial Statement, and also the Bill that was moved yesterday by the honourable Minister for Local Government that will develop BPAS in the Town Country Planning Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this reform brings exactly what we have far too long debated about, which is balancing development with conservation and addressing the red tapes in our administrative

processes.

Why Standing Order 51? Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 51 is justified for three key reasons:

- (1) The current law is outdated, and the absence of clear processes, timelines and enforcement mechanisms compromises public interest, investor confidence and environmental protection;
- (2) Cabinet has expressly directed the amendment and tabling of this Bill to support national development reforms, including digitized approvals; and
- (3) Delays in updating the law allow illegal developments, pollution breaches, and compliance loopholes to continue creating financial and environmental risk for Government and communities.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, immediate action is in the national interest, and that is why I am moving it under Standing Order 51, given the urgency, and to correct the various gaps that are in the operation of the law at the moment.

On the consultation process, this is not a rushed Bill. It follows Cabinet direction and policy endorsement, close collaboration with the Office of the Solicitor-General, consultation across key Government Ministries and agencies, technical drafting based on operational challenges and legal lessons. The Bill reflects detailed, evidence-based reform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to highlight the major reforms:

- (1) Modernisation of Definitions and Governance Structure  
The Bill removes outdated terms and introduces new definitions to clarify responsibility and elimination of confusion. It includes:
  - (1) Introduction of the term “licencing authority”; and
  - (2) Defining “development site” to include approved and unapproved sites.

This ensures a clear, accountable governance framework across all agencies involved in development approvals.

- (2) Centralisation of EIA Decision-Making  
The Bill centralises screening, scoping, approval and compliance functions under the Department of Environment. This addresses past challenges where multiple authorities created delays, disputes and inconsistent decisions.

Centralisation creates:

- (1) One process;
- (2) One standard; and
- (3) One accountable decision-maker.

This reform strengthens integrity, consistency and efficiency.

- (3) Introduction of Mandatory Legal Timelines  
At the heart of this Bill is the introduction of strict, legally binding timelines for environmental approvals. The revised timeframes are as follows:

- 7 working days for screening decisions, previously 10 working days;
- 15 working days for Terms of Reference, previously 21 days; and
- 20 working days for Management Plan decisions, previously 30 working days.

This is transformative. It reduces delays, eliminates bottlenecks, supports investors, and aligns with the national Ease of Doing Business agenda. Faster approvals without compromising environmental protection.

(4) Formalisation of the Management Plan System

Not all developments require a full EIA. The Bill recognises this by establishing a formal management plan process for lower-risk activities. The Amendment Bill, therefore, introduces:

- (1) A clear scope and term of reference;
- (2) Accredited consultants; and
- (3) Defined approval pathways.

This ensures proportionality, protecting the environment while enabling development.

(5) Strengthen Enforcement Powers

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill introduces significant enforcement reforms:

- (1) Immediate prohibition notice to stop harmful activities;
- (2) Powers to inspect unapproved development sites;
- (3) Powers to enter and inspect vehicles, vessels and aircraft;
- (4) A fixed penalty of \$10,000 for impersonating inspectors; and
- (5) Tiered penalties for illegal development, up to \$750,000 and imprisonment.

These provisions give Government and its officers the tools to respond proactively and initiate follow-up legal processes for repeated offenders.

(6) Waste and Pollution Control Reforms

The Bill also strengthens waste management by allowing fixed penalty notices and prosecution for non-payment. This ensures better compliance and monitoring of waste facilities. There are many facilities in Fiji that do not hold a valid permit, despite being sent multiple non-compliance notice. These facilities must be taken to task.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, the Act is 20 years old and no longer fit for purpose in the time and era we are in now. Cabinet has directed urgent reform. The Bill delivers modern, efficient and enforceable environmental governance, reduced timelines, support development and national growth. I respectively urge this august House and the Opposition to support the passage of the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025.

Its enactment will ensure that Fiji has a responsive, development-ready and future-focused environment framework, one that safeguards our people, our natural resources and our economic prosperity for generations to come.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, honorable Minister for bringing the Bill to Parliament. There is one thing that we had a brief look at in terms of what the Bill is trying to do, some parts of it are admirable, something that needs to be done. But I think the issue that we have, after having a few minutes of reading through it, I think it requires a bit more attention and the fact that it is moved under Standing Order 51 to be debated next week is something that is very worrying.

I also noticed that the honourable Minister used to be anti-Standing Order 51. Now, he is using it, so I congratulate him. Even though he is still on this side, he has flipped to the other side. That is our major concern. There are some issues there that I think, for us, would have required a bit more intense scrutiny. We want to make sure that the trade issues happen, but we want to make sure that the environment, which no one will be able to repair if it is gone, is maintained. For that, Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred that we had gone to committee to have some sort of consultation reviewed, before it was brought back to Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to honourable Usamate, I have already applied the amount of consultation that has been done. Again, you have a few days to go through the Bill, and we will debate on the content on Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2025.

I hope honourable Bala has already given me assurances of our Minister for Environment that we will be supporting the Bill. So I am thanking him in advance.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	31
Noes	10
Not Voted	14

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I thank you all for your presence and your contribution to the proceedings. Rest well!

The Parliament is adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.04 p.m.

**ANNEXURE I**

**Reply to Written Question No. 289/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 2467)**



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

Reply to Question No. 289/2025 is as follows:

1. The Ministry of Education had recorded a total of 29 alleged cases of cheating and malpractice across Year 12 external examination only during the three-year period of 2022, 2023 and 2024.

The breakdown of cases are as follows:

Examination Year	Cases	Level/No. of Cases
2022	20	Year 12 – 20 cases
2023	3	Year 12 – 3 cases
2024	6	Year 12 – 6 cases

2. These reported cases were investigated by the Ministry of Education and all cases were resolved. The data suggests overall improvement in exam integrity from 2022 to 2024, with a marked reduction in malpractice cases.
3. The Ministry of Education will continue to collaborate with school leaders, supervisors, students, parents and law enforcement to ensure that our national qualifications remain robust and credible, reflecting the genuine academic achievement of our students.

## ANNEXURE II

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**Reply to Written Question No. 290/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management (Ref. Page 2467)**


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**MINISTER FOR RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT AND DISASTER  
MANAGEMENT  
(Hon. S.R. Ditoka)**

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Reply to Question No. 290/2025 is as follows:

Background

1. The District Advisory Council (DAC) is a key component of Fiji's rural development architecture. It supports the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management in assessing community needs and addressing development issues in areas located outside traditional village boundaries.
2. A formal Terms of Reference guide the DAC. This document outlines the functions of the Council, as well as specific roles and responsibilities of DAC Chairpersons and Members.
3. In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the District Advisory Councils are responsible for the following:
  - (i) Providing a formal link between communities and the Government, particularly in promoting and facilitating the implementation of Government programmes, capital projects, and disaster operations at the community level.
  - (ii) Facilitating partnerships and multicultural development between state and non-state actors to support inclusive development in their respective areas.
  - (iii) Ensuring equitable distribution of Government project benefits, with a focus on inclusion and fairness for all members of the communities they serve; and
  - (iv) Providing timely advisory services to both their communities and Government through the District Officers and Provincial Administrators.

Number of District Advisory Councillors

4. There are currently 302 DAC constituencies across Fiji's four administrative divisions. The distribution of these constituencies by Division and Province is outlined below:

<b>DAC Distribution</b>	<b>Sum of No. of Constituencies and Councillors</b>
<b>Central</b>	<b>71</b>
Naitasiri	26
Rewa	14
Serua/Namosi	11
Tailevu	20
<b>Eastern</b>	<b>7</b>

Kadavu	2
Lomaiviti	5
<b>Northern</b>	<b>81</b>
Bua	12
Cakaudrove	31
Macuata	38
<b>Western</b>	<b>143</b>
Ba	89
Nadroga/Navosa	30
Ra	24
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>302</b>

5. Each constituency is represented by one Councillor, bringing the total number of District Advisory Councillors to 302.

#### District Advisory Councillors' Allowances

6. District Advisory Councillors receive a fixed monthly allowance to support their duties. The current allowance rates are:
- (i) \$220 per month for Chairpersons; and
  - (ii) \$200 per month of Members.
7. These rates came into effect following the 2023-2024 National Budget Address and remain applicable at present. ‘
8. Prior to the 2023-2024 budget revision, the previous allowance rates were:
- (i) \$200 per month for Chairpersons; and
  - (ii) \$172.50 per month for Members.

**ANNEXURE III**

**Reply to Written Question No. 291/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 2467-2468)**



**MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL**  
(Hon. S.D. Turaga)

Reply to Question No. 291/2025 is as follows:

Pending Cases In Legal Practitioners Unit (LPU) as at 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2025

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
2	24	43	88	118	118	115	110	111

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
127	128	127	98	132	122	108	222	<b>1793</b>

Number of Legal Officers

Year 2023

Month	PLO	SLO	LO
March	1		4
April	1		3
May	1		4
June	1		4
July	1		4
August	1		4
September	1		4
October	1	1	6
November	1	1	6
December	1	1	6

Year 2024

Month	ML	SLO	LO
January	1	1	6
February	1	1	6
March	1	1	6
April	1	2	5
May	1	2	5
June	1	3	4
July	1	3	4
August	1	3	3
September	1	3	3
October	1	3	3
November	1	3	4
December	1	3	4

Year 2025

<b>Month</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>LO</b>
January	1	2	4
February	1	2	6
March	1	2	6
April	1	2	6
May	1	1	6
June	1	1	6
July	1	3	6
August	1	3	6
September	1	3	6
October	1	3	6

## Commentary

1. There were 2,177 complaints pending when I joined as the Chief Registrar.
2. The Unit always had a young team and, on most occasions, not all the Legal Team positions were filled. As of 2025, all the legal team positions are filled.
3. There have been a total of 1,055 complaints disposed from 2023 to October 2025.