

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 3RD DECEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 3RD DECEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.32 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation; honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; honourable K.V. Ravu; honourable P.D. Kumar; and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 2nd December 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE DEPUTY SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome those who are joining us through the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for staying connected and engaged in our Parliamentary proceedings.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there will be four Committee Reports for tabling this morning.

We do not have honourable Rinesh Sharma in the House. That is fine. We will go to the next Report, and we will come back to that when honourable Sharma comes in.

Review Report on the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 30 of 2025).

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 in October of this year to scrutinise and return a report of its findings to Parliament. From the outset, the Bill proposes amendments to the Burial and Cremation Act 1911, aimed at updating the definitions of the law, increasing fines for

non-compliance, and shifting certain responsibilities from the Permanent Secretary to the Minister responsible for health.

The Bill also has provisions aimed at ensuring proper handling and disposal of body parts and waste products, aligns measurement units with international standards, and strengthens regulations for burial grounds and crematoria.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to provide a brief background on the amendment to this Act, with respect to clause 3 on the fines for unlicensed burial grounds, the fine for burying in unlicensed grounds is increased from \$200 to \$5,000. This particular amendment states that a deceased person must be buried only in a licensed burial ground. Anyone who buries a relative in an unlicensed burial ground without approval by the honourable Minister is liable for a fine not exceeding \$5,000. In this case, Madam Deputy Speaker, the overall burial grounds in Fiji that are currently registered are Kalabu, Nasinu, Narikoso, Nasavusavu, Raiwaqa, Raralevu and Tabale, Sigatoka, Suva Military Cemetery, Suva, Nasinu, Vatuwaqa, Levuka, Vaturekuka, Varavu and Vuninokonoko.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee, through its Report, has recommended that the Ministry of Health adopt a proactive approach in this matter. In particular, the Ministry should encourage all burial grounds to be formally registered under the Act whereby such registration will ensure compliance with licensing requirements, and enable effective monitoring of maintenance standards, and provide the necessary legal framework for addressing unsuitable sites.

Clause 4 - Measurement Units: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill replaces imperial units as yards with metric units - metres, for distances related to burial grounds and crematoria.

Clause 5 - Fines in Regulations: Madam Deputy Speaker, Clause 5 of the Bill amends section 7(3) of the Act. Section 7(3) sets out the penalty for failing to comply with the Minister's regulations on the maintenance of licensed burial grounds or crematoria. The maximum fine for breaches under this section is increased from \$100 to \$1,000.

Clause 6 - Offences and Fines: Madam Deputy Speaker, the fine for offences under section 8 of the principal Act is increased from \$50 to \$1,000. Section 8 empowers the Minister to prohibit burials or cremations in any burial ground or crematorium that is not deemed suitable. Once the Minister issues a notice in the Gazette prohibiting the use of a burial ground or crematorium, any burial or cremation conducted there becomes an offence. This offence applies to individuals, caretakers or operators who knowingly allow or perform burials or cremations in a closed site.

Clause 8 - Ministerial Responsibility for Breaches: Section 15 of the Act is amended whereby the responsibility for notifying breaches of burial conditions is shifted from the Permanent Secretary to the honourable Minister.

The fine for such breaches is increased from \$200 to \$1,000. This fine reflects the early origins of the law. At that time, \$50 was a significant deterrent but today, it is considered outdated, and this should be one of the reasons for the amendment of the Act.

The Committee conducted public consultations on the Bill across Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. A common issue raised during these consultations were in relation to acts of vandalism in burial grounds. The Committee observed that, considering the overcrowding of prisons and the inability of many offenders to pay the fines prescribed under the Act, alternative sentencing measures should be considered. Specifically, community work was noted as an appropriate penalty that would promote restorative justice, while reducing strain on the correctional system. However, the Committee suggested that such measures must remain subject to the discretion of the courts, which are best

placed to determine suitable sentencing in accordance with the circumstances of each case.

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

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

On behalf of the Standing Committee, I hereby commend the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 30/2025) to Parliament and seek support of all the Members of this august House for the Bill.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 2nd October 2025, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 4th December, 2025.

Review Report on the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights' Review Report on the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 31/2025).

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 in October of this year to scrutinize and return a report of its findings to Parliament.

From the outset, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Quarantine Act 1964 establishes the legal framework for preventing the introduction and spread of infectious diseases in Fiji through ships, aircraft, people and goods. However, the Act contains limited definitions, small fines of \$50 to \$100, and enforcement through criminal prosecution.

In contrast, the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 seeks to amend the Act to modernise Fiji's quarantine framework to address today's global health threats. The Bill expands coverage to include yachts, superyachts and modern travel boats. These vessels will be subject to the same quarantine protocols as commercial ships and aircraft, which means that health and safety regulations can be enforced more consistently across all maritime arrivals.

The Bill also introduces clearer governance roles for the Minister and Permanent Secretary and strengthens penalties with fixed fines of \$500 to \$1,000 and higher penalties for corporations. Enforcement is more flexible as compared to the Act, allowing fixed penalties with criminal action only if unpaid. Overall, the 2025 Bill updates outdated provisions to reflect modern disease surveillance, global travel realities and contemporary enforcement needs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is imperative to note that the Quarantine Act 1964 has been amended on several occasions to reflect Fiji's changing constitutional and public health landscape. Following Independence, the Constitution (Statutory Amendments) Order of 8th October, 1970,

realigned the Act with a new constitutional structure established on 10th October, 1970. Decades later, the Quarantine (Amendment) Decree No. 54/2010, enacted on 15th September, 2010, introduced significant updates to enforcement provisions and financial accountability measures in response to increasing international travel and trade. This amendment also ensured timely payment for quarantine services and established a \$500 fine for non-compliance by vessels and aircraft, thereby, strengthening Fiji's capacity to safeguard against infectious disease threats.

The Quarantine Act 1964 is complemented by the Biosecurity Act 2008. While the Quarantine Act 1964 focuses on public health quarantine, the Biosecurity Act 2008 covers agricultural and environmental biosecurity including pets, invasive species and trade-related risks.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these were some of the findings the Committee noted during its review of the Bill. As part of the review, the Committee also conducted consultation into targeted areas to gather opinions and feedback from the public.

The Committee received support on the introduction of the Bill from majority of the public that had participated in the public consultation. However, like most activities that impact the lives of the people, there were suggestions based on the premise of making improvements to the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, some of the issues the Committee noted during the public consultation was on the bureaucracy of vessel checks with regards to ports of entry in Fiji. From the yachting industry's perspective, health requirements were described as overly bureaucratic. It is highlighted that in some countries such as New Zealand, health and biosecurity functions are combined with a single officer trained to manage health, biosecurity, immigration and customs responsibilities. This approach reduces manpower and streamlines processes. It was then suggested to the Committee that Fiji consider adopting a similar system, emphasising that it is achievable and would enhance efficiency, while presenting the country more positively to high-value visitors.

On the same token, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee observed that only ports of entry currently recognised in Fiji are Suva, Lautoka and Levuka. We further noted that the Bill and its accompanying regulations do not presently designate Port Denarau and Savusavu as clearance ports. In light of their growing importance to tourism and trade, it has been proposed that both Savusavu and Port Denarau be formally included as designated ports of entry upon the passage of this Act, which would ensure consistency and alignment with Fiji's economic development objectives.

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

On that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their diligent deliberations and invaluable input.

On behalf of the Committee, Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 31/2025), to Parliament and seek support of all the Members of this august House for the Bill.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 2nd October, 2025, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report, and the Bill will

be debated and voted upon by Parliament tomorrow, Thursday, 4th December, 2025.

Honourable Members, we will now go back to the first two reports which should have been first on the Order Paper this morning.

Consolidated Review Report - Fiji Independent Commission
Against Corruption 2020-2023 Annual Reports

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) Annual Reports.

The Speaker of Parliament on 18th July, 2025, referred the Reports to the Committee for review. As part of this process, the Commission appeared before the Committee on 14th October, 2025, with the session broadcast live on Parliament's *Facebook* page and the Walesi Parliament channel.

In addition, the Committee conducted a site visit to FICAC's headquarters in Suva on 15th October, 2025, to gain further insight into the operations and facilities. The Committee noted that the three operating years reflected a period of significant operational challenges and transformation for the Commission.

Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission continued to uphold its constitutional mandate of investigating and prosecuting corruption-related offences and promoting good governance across all sectors of society. The Committee identified key operational challenges that required urgent attention, such as outdated infrastructure, limited staffing, and the need to modernise evidence management and digital systems.

As Fiji continues to uphold the principles of integrity, transparency and accountability, it is imperative that national anti-corruption institutions are equipped to meet evolving challenges in governance and public trust. The Committee notes that despite the challenges faced during the periods under review and the issues highlighted during the visit, the Commission has developed and published a Strategic Plan 2025-2030 which should improve the Commission's deliverables.

I extend my appreciation to the FICAC management and the staff for their cooperation during the Committee's review and to the Members of the Committee for their diligence in compiling this bipartisan Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

Review Report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2022-2023 Annual Report

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Review Report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2022-2023 Annual Report.

The Speaker of Parliament, on 4th August, 2025, referred the Report to the Committee for review. As part of this process, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) appeared before the Committee on 23rd October, 2025, with the session broadcast live on Parliament's *Facebook* page and the *Walesi* Parliament channel.

The Committee acknowledges that the reporting year marked a period of renewed economic confidence for Fiji, with FRCS collecting \$2.28 billion in net revenue, surpassing projections and contributing significantly to the country's post-pandemic recovery. Throughout the review, the Committee noted substantial progress in FRCS's digital transformation agenda, particularly the expansion of taxpayer online service platform and the continued rollout of the VAT Monitoring System. These reforms are essential to improving efficiency, transparency and voluntary compliance, while reducing the administrative burden on taxpayers and businesses.

The Committee also recognises the critical role FRCS plays in safeguarding Fiji's borders. In this regard, the Committee welcomes the developments towards establishing dedicated container examination facilities in Suva and Lautoka, the expansion of the K9 Unit, improved maritime surveillance and stronger inter-agency cooperation. However, the Committee remains concerned about the persistent risks posed by transnational crime and the need for accelerated improvements in intelligence, technology and integrity systems. Strengthening cybersecurity, modernising airport screening technologies, and enhancing real-time staff monitoring remain urgent priorities.

The Committee further examined institutional challenges highlighted during the year, including tax debt recovery, the administration of student loans, gaps in border-related legislation, and capacity constraints arising from funding shortfalls. The Committee commends the steps FRCS has taken to address these challenges, particularly through internal reforms, targeted partnerships with development agencies, and the implementation of a new job evaluation framework to retain skilled staff.

Aligned with Fiji's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee also acknowledges FRCS's initiatives to promote gender equity, support MSMEs and strengthen international partnerships with organisations such as UNDP, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Customs Organization (WCO), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and New Zealand Customs and the Australian Border Force.

Based on these assessments, the Committee makes several key recommendations to reinforce the operational capacity and integrity of the service. These include fast-tracking the establishment of container examination facilities, advancing cybersecurity safeguards, securing interim facilities for airport security technology upgrades, implementing a comprehensive integrity framework, expanding the K9 Unit and prioritising customer focused digital solutions through the Taxpayer Online Services (TPOS) and public awareness campaigns.

The Committee anticipates that the findings and recommendations contained in this Report will support ongoing reforms within FRCS and enhance its ability to fulfil its mandate of revenue collection, customs services and border protection.

I extend my appreciation to the FRCS management for their cooperation throughout this review process and to the Members of the Committee for their due diligence in compiling this bipartisan Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Minister for Health and Medical Services;
- (2) Minister for Environment and Climate Change;
- (3) Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development;
- (4) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry;
- (5) Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General;
- (6) Minister for Agriculture and Waterways; and
- (7) Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs.

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

Suicide Prevention

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Members of this august House, distinguished guests in the public gallery, members of the public virtually viewing this parliamentary session; *bula vinaka* and good morning to all of you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, over two months ago, on 10th September to be specific, Fiji joined the global community in the commemoration of World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) where we remembered the many lives lost to suicide, supported survivors and attempted suicide, and united with commitment to change the narrative around mental health and suicide.

The theme of the WSPD is changing the narrative on suicide, which is part of the triennial theme set by the International Association of Suicide Prevention for 2024 to 2026. The campaign's core message calls on individuals, communities and governments to shift from a culture of silence and stigma to one of openness, empathy and support and the accompanying call to action is to Start the Conversation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the event was a reminder that every life matters, and suicide can be prevented with collective action as it is a critical public health issue in Fiji. In Fiji, suicide rates have been a growing concern, especially amongst our youth and vulnerable populations with risk factors including:

- mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety;
- social determinants like unemployment, family violence and substance abuse; and
- limited access to mental healthcare in rural and remote areas.

Suicide leaves deep emotional and social scars on families and communities. Madam Deputy Speaker, I take this time to acknowledge the work of the National Committee on the Prevention of Suicide (NCOPS) for playing a critical role in addressing the rising suicide rates through national strategies and community-based approaches.

The NCOPS have developed a comprehensive national framework to address suicide prevention with its key strategic directions to include:

- implementation of national policies on suicide prevention;
- strengthening mental health services, especially in rural areas;
- community engagement and building awareness to reduce stigma;
- suicide prevention is incorporated into broader public health initiatives, promoting mental wellbeing across all sectors.

The recent NCOPS report, which provides an overview of the work completed in suicide prevention across Fiji, states that from January to August this year, Fiji recorded a total of 110 suicide cases, out of which 63 were complete suicide and 47 attempted suicide cases. A total of 13 youth, whose age range from 18 years to 24 years committed suicide, while 11 youth attempted suicide during the first eight months of this year. The report also states that our elderly population (those who are 60 years and above) have not been left out in this critical public health issue, as 11 of them have committed suicide and five attempted suicide.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the report also highlights that ethnicity-wise:

- Fijian of Indian Descent (FoID) recorded the highest number of 41 committing suicide and 33 attempted suicide cases; and
- *iTaukei* recorded 21 suicide cases and 13 attempted suicide cases.

The report indicates that males account for 70 percent of all cases, with hanging and chemical ingestion being the most common methods used. The Western Division continues to record the most number, with 32 suicide cases and 30 attempted suicide cases. The Southern Division shows a drastic decline of cases with eight suicide and two attempted suicide cases.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the NCOPS have come a long way in trying to tackle suicide prevention in the country through a coordinated approach with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Civil Society Organisations and faith-based organisations. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services plays a lead role in this coordinated approach awareness campaigns, hotline promotion, planned website technical expertise upgrades with mental health resources. The Ministry of Education, in having direct access to our youths and our young population have been conducting school dialogues, planned essay/artwork competition and youth marches. The Ministry of Justice plays a role of legal authority in terms of public advocacy, legal reforms, justice-informed, policy prevention, support through courts and integration corrections.

World Suicide Prevention Day theme about “Changing the Narrative on Suicide” means that we need to transform how we perceive this complex issue and shifting from a culture of silence and stigma to one of openness, understanding and support. The call to action to Start the Conversation encourages everyone to start the conversation on suicide and suicide prevention. Every conversation, no matter how small, contributes to a supportive and understanding society. By initiating these vital conversations we can break down barriers, raise awareness and create better cultures of support. In our churches, mosques, temples, sporting fields, and kava sessions, let us start these conversations.

As a nation, we must unite in acknowledging that suicide is unexplainable for individuals who have chosen death over life, despite the fact that we know it is God's will for us to live. For those survivors who have survived the aftermath of suicide, I am certain that talking about what happened can be very painful. But please know, Government has systems in place to support you and see you through these dark days. Reach out, we are here for you.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for the statement. I would like to say that we must be honest, this is not just a health topic, it is a national tragedy. Fiji has one of the world's highest suicide rates. We are losing our young people, especially those aged 18 years to 24 years. While the National Committee on the Prevention of Suicide is doing good work, the numbers tell us one thing, and that is, the current strategies are not working. We need real talk and real change.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister for Health handles the human cost, but we must answer the question of what the economic cause? We have heard about lowering inflation, but let me be clear, a small decrease in inflation is still inflation. The cost of living remains extremely high. This constant struggle for money is what is destroying hope and driving our citizens, especially the youth, to despair and suicide. The Government's economic policy has a direct human cost. We are missing the mark on who is suffering most. The statistics show that 76 percent of completed suicides are men. Why is there not a major national campaign dedicated to helping men, helping Fijian men talk about their struggles? We are failing them.

Secondly, the Western Division is the hardest hit. With the highest number of cases, this proves that our mental health services are too concentrated in cities. People in rural areas feel isolated and cannot access help. We need mobile mental health teams, like doctors and nurses on wheels, dedicated to reaching every village and settlement in the Western Division. We must take help to the people who need it most.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the crisis starts at home. The main cause of suicide is not just sickness, but problems with relationships and family conflicts. We must support the family unit. Look at our schools. Academic pressure from parents and the system is crushing our children. Students feel they must commit suicide if they fail an exam. We need the honourable Minister for Education to immediately implement programmes that teach students that their value is not tied to their grades. We must teach resilience.

I know exam results will be out in December. I am humbly requesting all parents not to put too much pressure on their children if they do not do so well in their exams. Today, I think the Fiji Eighth Year Examination results is out, and I congratulate all those who have done well. For those who have not done so well, there is always a second time. We also need more accessible free counselling for marital and family problems. We expect families to handle the stress of modern life, but we give them no resources to do so. We must invest in healing the family to heal the nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not just the honourable Minister for Health's problem, it is the entire Government's responsibility. We need an inclusive approach where we demand that

Ministers tell us what the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Social Welfare are specifically doing to fight this crisis. We need teamwork from all ministries.

Finally, we need transparency. I call on the honourable Minister to provide this Parliament with a detailed report twice a year. This report must show us not just effort, but results - a clear decrease in the number of attempted suicides, especially among our young people, and better access to services in the Western Division. We must measure our success by the lives we save.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government has boasted about extra money and surplus, of which some have been used for other health issues. We must find significant dedicated funding for this mental health crisis. We must stop counting the dead and start investing in hope.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP30 Outcomes

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members, before I go into my Ministerial Statement, I would like to congratulate the Reserve Bank of Fiji and also His Excellency yesterday for launching the polymer notes, which are also environmentally friendly.

I rise before this august House to report the outcomes of the 30th Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This year's meeting of COP was held in Belém, Brazil, in the heart of the Amazon. Despite the logistical challenges associated with the location, Fiji managed to put together a strong technical team that upheld and protected our positions and priorities within the critical multilateral process.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this year's Parties were required to submit revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) for the 2025 to 2035 period. In light of the current emissions trends, and with average global warming now close to the 1.5-degree limit, this round of NDCs is the most important for maintaining the potential to avoid the overshoot of temperatures. Furthermore, considering the recent advisory opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), COP30 was seen as an important watershed moment for reorientating global cooperation to address climate change around a clear understanding of state responsibility and shared obligations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji successfully submitted the third NDC to the UNFCCC ahead of COP30. Despite our limited capacity and challenging circumstances, we met our obligations and presented a holistic NDC that reflects our need and context. Unfortunately, to-date, only 100 parties have submitted revised NDCs, endangering the 1.5-degree temperature guardrail.

With this knowledge, Small Island Developing States arrived in Belem with clear demands. We demanded an agenda item to discuss a global NDC response plan in light of the major shortfall in national commitments. However, we were not the only group to arrive in Belem with frustration and expectations. Other groups demanded agenda items related to finance, unilateral trade measures and other issues that continue to compromise and challenge national action and ambition. Overall, despite the high ambition of the Brazilian Presidency, the COP proceedings were heavily influenced by the tense and fractured state of current geopolitics.

We faced many operational challenges in Belem, not only including accommodation shortages, protests, extreme weather, flooding at the venue, and even a fire that resulted in the day of lost negotiations. However, despite these challenges and geopolitical realities, we emerged with outcomes that represent the progress we can be proud of.

Madam Deputy Speaker, aside from the specific agenda items being negotiated at COP, the

Brazilian Presidency pushed to land a negotiated cover decision to be part of the overall package. This package aimed to consolidate the various agenda proposals previously mentioned and was informed by many days of high-level discussions between the heads of delegations and chief negotiators across various negotiating groups.

Madam Deputy Speaker, *Mutirao* is a word in Portuguese which translates to joint effort. In the effort to agree on the Mutirao decision text, negotiations continued until the last official day of COP30 and into an additional day. The world remained deeply divided with over 80 parties pushing against references in the text to “transitioning away from fossil fuels”, despite this language being agreed at COP28. At one stage, it seemed possible that COP30 would conclude without any agreed outcome at all.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is no exaggeration to say that Fiji's delegation played a highly influential role at COP30. This is not just my perspective as Head of Delegation – this is supported by negotiation records in international media including the Earth Negotiation Bulletin. I particularly wish to recognise my Permanent Secretary, Dr. Sivendra Michael, who was appointed by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Chair's team as one of the three negotiators mandated to engage directly with the COP Presidency on behalf of the 39 Small Island Developing States.

Dr. Michael remained in the presidency negotiations for more than 20 hours straight and then continued through the night as the COP ran 27 hours overtime. They defended the AOSIS position during the most contentious phase of the Mutirao negotiations. His efforts, especially on the final text, helped secure a commitment by developed countries to triple adaptation finance by 2030 and ensured strong language urging increased adaptation finance pathways to developing countries.

While explicit references to fossil fuels was not agreeable to many parties, the final decision reflected AOSIS' push to address the NDC ambition gap and protect the 1.5-degree temperature limit, including through the launch of the Global Implementation Accelerator and the Belém Mission to 1.5-degrees Celsius. These achievements were secured under the extraordinary pressure and the Permanent Secretary's leadership in that negotiation was central to ensuring that Fiji and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) achieved the best possible outcome.

Madam Deputy Speaker another key result for Fiji was under the agenda item of Just Transition, which focusses on ensuring that mitigation and adaptation transitions protect human rights and reduce harm. Fiji leads and coordinates Just Transition negotiations for the AOSIS as well as PSIDS. I congratulate the negotiators for securing the first decision on this agenda item since the Just Transition Work Programme was adopted in Dubai at COP28.

The decision includes key AOSIS asks, including a dedicated reference to the 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature goal, recognition of the special circumstances of SIDS and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and linking Just Transition to the loss and damage outcomes. Furthermore, the decision mandates the development of a mechanism to operationalise the work programme, shifting it from dialogue to implementation, which is something we have been pushing for since Fiji's COP presidency.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on loss and damage negotiations, Fiji served as the coordinator for PSIDS. At COP30, after over two years of failed negotiations, Parties finally took a decision finalising the third review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. While the previous review delivered the Santiago Network to strengthen national capacity, this third review has now secured a mandate to produce a regular global report on loss and damage, which further embeds loss and damage as a central policy pillar under the UNFCCC.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji also co-chaired negotiations tasked with developing guidance of the new Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, which delivered the first decision agreed during the COP30 process. This hard-won decision links the Fund to the new collective climate finance goal agreed in COP29, ensuring that this Fund will be further resourced by developed countries.

On the first day of the COP30, the Fund successfully launched its first call for funding requests, with proposals ranging from US\$5 million and US\$20 million. Again, this decision was significantly influenced by Fiji, as we are one of the two AOSIS representatives on the Loss and Damage Board, where decisions were made at the last board meeting on the co-design of this funding call.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as AOSIS champion for Oceans, Fiji advocated strongly for integrating ocean issues into climate policy. The Mutirao Decision explicitly recognises the interlinked global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and ocean degradation. This grounding advances the ocean-climate agenda and strengthens call for greater investment in ocean resilience.

Time is not on our side to reflect on every outcome we achieved. However, in addition to those already mentioned, we secured outcomes on Technology and Capacity Building, Global Goal and Adaptation, and Gender Action Plan, to name a few. A full report on the outcomes will be published in January 2026 and as we have promised before we left, it will be made public and available following Cabinet endorsement.

Madam Deputy Speaker I would like to turn to one of the persistent challenges we continue to face at every COP negotiation. That is the question who pays and who is eligible to receive finance. Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement calls upon developed country Parties to provide financial resources to support mitigation and adaptation of developing countries. However, many developing countries feel this commitment is not sufficiently realised. At COP30, we collectively agreed that this must be clarified through a work programme.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to update Parliament on the COP31 hosting arrangements. As widely reported by the media, Australia was not able to secure hosting rights due to the longstanding impasse with Turkey. I commend the Government of Australia, particularly honourable Minister Chris Bowen for brokering an arrangement that prioritises cooperation and collaboration and upholds the ethics of multilateralism. While Turkey will host COP31 and take on the COP Presidency, Australia will preside over the negotiations. Australia and Turkey have jointly agreed that the Pre-COP will be hosted by a Pacific Island nation, and we aspire to link the Pre-COP with a global pledging event for the Pacific Resilience Facility.

Madam Deputy Mr. Speaker, in the margins of COP30, Pacific Ministers met with honourable Minister Chris Bowen to discuss these new arrangements. During this meeting, Fiji expressed interest to host the Pre-COP, and Tuvalu had expressed interest to have a component of the pre-COP hosted there. The Secretariat made up of Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and Australia had been tasked to host another Ministerial meeting in the coming months to discuss the Pre-COP hosting arrangements. Our PIFS leaders have tasked Climate Change Ministers to work with the secretariat to finalise the Pre-COP hosting arrangements, and we must respect the trust placed in us and the process for agreement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the decision of Pre-COP to be held in the Pacific and Australia presiding over negotiations ensures the Pacific can influence the shaping of COP31 at the highest level. While the deal may not be satisfactory to everyone, it is balanced and still provides opportunity for PSIDS to highlight the realities of climate change.

Madam Deputy, before I offer my concluding statements, I would like to respond to the remarks made by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, who suggested that "key technical personnel" were not part of Fiji's delegation to COP30. The facts I have just presented clearly reflect otherwise. Fiji took a highly competent, experienced and strategically selected team. A team that delivered results at the highest level of the negotiation process. Even without the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) focal point, we had officers who are chosen by the IPCC to be contributing or lead authors for the next cycle of IPCC reports. These were the calibre of people in our delegation that directly engaged in technical work and negotiations. Furthermore, some officers who did not travel had prioritised staying in Fiji to advance other national responsibilities. The outcomes Fiji secured at COP30, and the significant role our negotiators played, speak for themselves.

I wish to address the narratives of some members of the public that continue to question why Fiji sends a large number of people to climate COPs or why do we even need to participate in these multilateral processes? Let me be very clear. Fiji does not attend these meetings as spectators, we attend to defend our economic interests, our people and our sovereignty. As parties to the Convention, it is our obligation to attend and contribute to the multilateral process. COP is where the rules, the finance, the safeguards, and the global climate obligations that directly affect our nation are negotiated. Our development partners understand this, which is why they provide substantive financial support to enable our participation.

We agree that the challenges at home require urgent attention, but it is equally important for our citizens to understand that many of these challenges will continue to worsen if the world's major emitters and global polluters continue to operate as usual. Without global cooperation on climate finance, adaptation, emissions reduction, and protection of the 1.5-degree limit, Fiji will face escalating costs, greater climate impacts, and deeper vulnerabilities, no matter how hard we work domestically. We also will not benefit from any climate funds operating under UNFCCC if we are not party to the Convention. If Fiji is not in the room, decisions will be made about us or without us. Negotiations determine the level of finance available for adaptation, rules governing loss and damage support, and the recognition of special circumstances for SIDS. Each of these has direct implications for our villages, coastal communities, our infrastructure, our insurance costs, and even our long-term statehood.

This is why we send a team that is technically strong, present across multilateral negotiation streams, and capable of shaping outcomes because of the consequences of silence or absence are far greater than the cost of participation. A good example is the Community Climate Adaptation Facility (CCAF). At COP29, we agreed with Global Centre for Climate Mobility (GCCM) to design a funding call for communities directly. The team returned from COP and worked throughout the first half of the year to get the design documents finalised and advertised. Fiji was the first country to roll-out the CCAF project.

In August, three communities were selected from the 11 that applied, and the funders have agreed for these funds to go directly to the community to support their projects. We agreed from the onset that the funds will go directly to the communities, and we negotiated these terms and conditions.

Next week, Macuata-i-Wai will be receiving its first payout of the US\$100,000 secured. My team is now finalising the contractual agreement for Narata Village in Nadroga and Vuniniudrovu in Naitasiri. To add, my Permanent Secretary has been working with the GCCM team on a proposal to the Green Climate Fund to expand this initiative, so that other communities can also benefit. The truth is that we need bankable projects, and communities will be supported to develop bankable project proposals. So, to members of the public who continue to disregard these realities, this is exactly why being at the table is not an option for a vulnerable nation like ours. It is essential.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to close, I would once again like to reiterate that I am very proud to report on yet another COP in which the Fiji delegation's outstanding commitment and performance influenced global outcomes. At every turn, our negotiators came forward with proposals and solutions, and our positions were recognised in the final hours when a process involving 50,000 people is reduced to a room of fewer than 50 delegates. Our delegates played many roles in the process; our views were always sought, our voice was often recognised as representative not only of our nation, but of small developing states in general.

Madam Deputy Speaker, engaging in events at this level is similar to a military exercise – our teams deploy to various fronts and engage in a multitude of battles. This year we have emerged with a shared understanding that we fought well, did the best we could, and achieved an outcome that at various stages seemed impossible. While we urgently need and expect more from these negotiations, we continue to move forward with both hope and ambition.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honorable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and the issues that his highlighted on what the Fiji delegation has done. I for one, I am a very strong advocate for the need for Fiji to always send strong powerful delegations to these meetings. When you have a battle where the solution is not in Fiji, you have to take the battle to where the solution is. It is very important that we send strong delegations to COP meetings. The important thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is to make sure that the right people go; the right people that are fit for purpose; people who know what to do, not just go there and do nothing. I know there are some people who go there, they do nothing but just walk around. That is very important. This battle has to be fought there.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was there in Paris 10 years ago and there was so much hope. It was very positive about what happened there. One of the big things about Paris is the United States of America was firmly behind it. Now they are on the other side. What we have seen out of this COP, that the outcomes, I am not talking about what Fiji has done, but it has been a very weak COP in terms of outcomes! As the honourable Minister has said, there has been no direct tax on the need to cut down on fossil fuels; no tax whatsoever. The ambition gap has not been closed. We know what we need to be able to do.

Now, it is certain that we will not hit 1.5 degrees Celsius. It is absolutely certain that it will not be done. What is being happening here is large countries around the world have decided that we, the small countries will sink. That is basically what they have decided. They talk about this triple adaptation, where they are going to triple the amount of funds for adaptation, at the same time, they are ramping up the use of fossil fuels. It is happening in all these countries. It is happening in the United States of America, it is happening in our biggest partners - China.

The percentage of renewable energy is shooting up, but also the exploitation of fossil fuels. Same too for our biggest friend, Australia – a very good friend to Fiji, 43 percent of all the assistance that we get in the Pacific comes from Australia, but they are also shooting up the amount of money they are putting for fossil fuels. What they are doing is they are putting more out into the atmosphere. It is going to get warmer. The sea levels are going to rise. Our coral reefs are already dying; this is what is happening.

The former Prime Minister used to refer to all of these countries as the coalition of the selfish. I would call them now the coalition of the short-sighted, shameless selfish! I call upon the countries of the world, we must make sure

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Hogwash!

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is not hogwash, that is hogwash! For someone to be able to say 'hogwash' when I am calling upon the countries of the world that are the greatest emitters to do something about that, and then he has the capacity to call that hogwash. That is absolutely ridiculous!

I congratulate the honourable Minister. We need to be able to do this. We need to go there, but we call upon these countries in the world; they have completely changed. They are even challenging the science behind all this. I hear as I am reading about the reports, the idea of multilateralism seems to have died. It has gone down the drain.

We appreciate what the delegation has done. We appreciate what you do, but I think for us in Fiji, listening that we will have the Pre-COP next year, and I congratulate the honourable Minister. We need to keep on working as much as possible to shame these countries. To bring them to bear to what they are doing to this planet. We bear the brunt of it, and they need to be able to bear the price of what they do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think in the future we have to make sure that these short-sighted, shameless, selfish countries must come to their senses. They must be long-sighted. They must focus on the life of this planet and be able to plug the gaps that need to be plugged. Once again, thanks to the honourable Minister, and we need to keep up with this fight.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will adjourn for tea. When we come back in half an hour, we will hear from the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.34 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.11 a.m.

Update on the Economy of Levuka

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to update this august House on Government's plan to revitalise the economy of Levuka, a town of approximately 3,000 people and proudly recognised for its distinguished World Heritage status. I wish to make this statement because of the importance of Levuka in our history, the importance of its people and the economy, and also due to the Whole of Government initiative and plans for Levuka, its people, and the whole of the Lomaiviti Group. It is not only finance, not only commercial or business development, but a Whole of Government initiative.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Levuka remains a site of significant national and historical value, as Fiji's first capital and a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – recognised heritage town. The Coalition Government is committed to ensuring that economic development in Levuka is pursued in a manner that protects its heritage character, while supporting sustainable economic growth for the people of Ovalau and the wider Lomaiviti Group. Levuka's rejuvenation can be broken down into two key plans - short-to-medium and long-term. In my statement this morning, I will divulge into some of the short-to-medium and long-term works and plans.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on cultural and heritage development, heritage is the foundation of Levuka's economic potential. The Department of Culture under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is leading a holistic approach, ensuring that development is guided by cultural conservation, community participation, and sustainable use of heritage space.

The passing of the Fiji World Heritage Act 2024 is a major milestone. This law protects Levuka's heritage buildings, landscape and public spaces from activities that may undermine its World Heritage status. The Government has invested approximately over \$102,000 since 2023 to implement the Levuka management plans, significantly higher than previous allocations. With support from JICA, Japanese conservation specialists are assisting homeowners and craftsmen to rehabilitate buildings using UNESCO-approved restoration techniques.

A Heritage Carpentry Training Programme has already trained 14 local carpenters, with more to follow. This builds local skills and ensures repairs comply with heritage standards. The Government is also developing an integrated Ovalau and Levuka World Heritage Tourism Initiative, which will focus on identifying heritage tourism products, village landscaping, footpath development, and overall improving tourism services and branding. Work is also progressing on the Events Calendar for Levuka which will introduce cultural festivals, heritage tours, sailing and historical races, arts programmes and makete events to attract visitors year-round.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Town Scheme Plan for Levuka has been reviewed by the Department of Town and Country Planning in close consultation with the Department of Heritage. This work is currently in progress. The review is essential to ensuring that development in Levuka is carefully managed to preserve its historical, cultural and architectural character while still allowing for modern infrastructure and sustainable growth. The updated scheme will guide construction and renovation to ensure compatibility with heritage values, protect important landmarks and streetscapes, and incorporate environmental, safety and infrastructure considerations. Importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, this review also supports sustainable tourism and economic development by providing clear guidelines for property owners and investors, so that future growth enhances, rather than undermines Levuka's identity.

On the Town Council, Madam Deputy Speaker, we will continue to develop Levuka Town to be

an engine of growth not only for Ovalau, but for the whole of Lomaiviti Islands and its people.

The Levuka Market, a \$2.9 million facility was completed and opened in November 2024. With the support from the UN Women and the Government of Canada, total investment exceeds \$3.1 million. The market accommodates 132 vendors and includes a women's accommodation centre with a disabled-friendly lift; improving safety and accessibility for women from remote communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the redevelopment of Nasau Park has also commenced with \$293,400 allocated for Phase One to upgrade the pavilion and surrounding facilities. All works have been implemented in line with Levuka's heritage conservation requirements.

Levuka Town Council continues to face significant financial constraints with rate arrears amounting to over \$240,000 as at October, and of those 152 registered ratepayers, most arrears are owed by businesses largely due to concerns regarding the high-rate structure. To strengthen its revenue position, the Council is intensifying its areas recovery efforts, including the re-engagement of legal officers to support enforcement actions and enhance the effectiveness of collections.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government is assisting municipal councils including Levuka to improve systems and financial management. The new FMIS has strengthened budget controls, enabled real-time transactions and improved audit trails.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are tax initiatives or incentives provided to Levuka to stimulate investment. Levuka continues to benefit from incentive programmes such as Tax-Free Region Incentives, land- subdivision incentives, hotel and medical sector incentives, and duty concessions across all sectors.

The Government remains committed to supporting the Pacific Fishing Company's (PAFCO) operations. Assistance is provided through custom duty exemptions on packaging materials, quality control equipment, machinery, and raw tuna products, apart from providing government guarantee when needed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, PAFCO continues to play a pivotal role in the economic and social fabric of the Lomaiviti Province. As the largest single employer in Levuka and its surrounding islands, PAFCO provides employment to more than 1,000 workers and remains a pillar of Levuka's economy. Its operations support households, sustains local businesses and contributes significantly to the town's overall economic stability.

Despite the decreasing supply of tuna to the factory, PAFCO continues to diversify its products and is working with financiers to invest in updating and improving its infrastructure and processing lines, to increase efficiency and boost production. The company continues to develop products that will appeal to customers as they strive to secure not only local, but more international customers. The Ministry of Fisheries, through its Minister, is assisting in the procurement of tuna stocks from our neighbouring Pacific Island Countries.

As part of the future strategy, Government is assessing targeted initiatives for heritage-based businesses; special SMSE support, including micro-grants and loans; and feasibility of partial or full tax-free zone designation for Ovalau to stimulate population retention and business expansion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to highlight the major infrastructural work currently underway in Levuka, which is central to revitalising the town and in supporting surrounding communities.

The Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is progressing strategic upgrades, including road sealing, drainage improvements, street lighting and road repairs that strengthen both, the economic and social fabric of Levuka. Key ongoing works include:

- (1) the rip and remake of the Levuka-Nasova Government Station frontage;
- (2) upgrades to the second village frontage in Draiba;
- (3) installation of catch pit covers along the Ovalau Circular Road; and
- (4) street-lighting improvements in Draiba Village.

Sealing works in Onoviro, Nasova and Draiba, together with grading and compaction along the Ovalau Circular Road, will reduce dust, improve road durability and enhance connectivity for residents, farmers, and traders.

There are planned works for the remaining sections of the Ovalau Circular Road, including the:

- (1) re-gravelling from Natokalau Village to Buresala Jetty;
- (2) drainage improvements from the Cawaci to Viro; and
- (3) safety upgrades on identified blind bends to improve road-user visibility.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the upgrading of Levuka's main street and village frontages reflect our commitment to building a vibrant, safe and dynamic Levuka. These initiatives will create lasting benefits for the people of Levuka and the wider Ovalau community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Levuka is currently supplied by three water sources - Waitovu, Levuka-vakaviti and Totogo. Despite these, the township remains vulnerable during prolonged dry periods. To address that, Government, through the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), has outlined two major long-term investments under the Water Sector Strategy 2050, as follows:

- (1) Levuka Water Trunk Mains Upgrade and Network Extension, which is estimated at \$20.5 million by 2030, to modernise infrastructure, improve reliability and support future growth.
- (2) New Levuka Wastewater Treatment Plant and Sewer System, which is estimated at \$15 million by 2050, to strengthen environmental protection and support sustainable urban and tourism development.

In the short to medium term, WAF is enhancing existing water facilities, including the Totogo Reservoir replacement, costing \$2.38 million, and upgrading raw water intake screens for all three sources to improve quality and operational efficiency. Additional water sources are being investigated to ensure climate resilient supply.

On wastewater, WAF will revise the Wastewater Management Plan in 2026-2027, to align infrastructure with modern standards, population growth, and Levuka's heritage obligations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these initiatives demonstrate Government's commitment to providing Levuka with resilient, sustainable water and wastewater infrastructure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on agricultural development, as we safeguard Levuka's world-renowned heritage, we must also prepare for the challenges of changing climate and rising energy costs. In this regard, the Coalition Government is supporting the Pacific's first GCF-KOICA Agrivoltaics Project, with civil works valued at \$1.4 million. This project will integrate solar energy and crop production, reduce Ovalau's diesel use and emissions by over 57 percent, create local

employment, and establish a research station that positions Ovalau as a regional hub for renewable agriculture.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to reduce our dairy import bill, the Ministry continues to strengthen dairy in the Schools Programme, targeting boarding schools. St. John's College in Ovalau, a key beneficiary, has received digger works, fencing materials, training, and five heifers to revive its dairy farm. In addition, through the Commercial Agriculture Development Programme, a fruit nursery worth \$12,000 has been established at St. John's College, to encourage early learning in fruit propagation and reduce reliance on imported fruits.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry has also improved market access through the construction of 1.2 kilometres of farm access road in Lovoni, benefiting around 50 farmers. Finally, to support youth and women farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture distributed 54,000 kava cuttings and 30,000 *dalo* toppings to youth clusters across Ovalau, enabling increased participation in commercial agriculture. Madam Deputy Speaker, these targeted interventions reflect our commitment to strengthening Ovalau's economy, enhancing food security, and building climate-resilient communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the long term, Government, which involves some of the Ministries and Ministers, are looking at Levuka and, importantly, Ovalau through the Green Island lens/concept/pilot project. It is in its conceptual stage and a master plan needs to be drawn up to capture development initiatives for Levuka and Ovalau.

The master plan will represent high impact cross-sectoral initiatives that align national development priorities with global sustainable trends. This concept demonstrates Fiji's leadership in innovative island transformation, heritage protection, disaster resilience and climate action based on four key initiatives:

- (1) Climate Resilient infrastructure;
- (2) a 100 percent renewable energy grid;
- (3) heritage driven tourism hub; and
- (4) electrified transport and organic agriculture.

Madam Deputy Speaker, due to time constraints, I cannot delve into the details of the concept, but probably at a later date. However, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs; Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management; Ministry of Local Government and Climate Change; Office of the Attorney-General; Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport; Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources; Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry; and the Office of the Prime Minister will all be involved.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Levuka's economy will grow when its heritage is protected, its infrastructure is strengthened, and its people are empowered through coordinated investments in heritage conservation, tourism development, agriculture and infrastructure. Government is ensuring that Levuka remains a thriving world heritage town, economically vibrant, culturally rich and resilient for generations to come. Levuka is not only a treasure of Fiji's past, but also a cornerstone of our future.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker and I thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I rise to respond to the honourable Minister for Finance's Statement

regarding the severe and sustained economic neglect of Levuka, a site whose cultural and historical value, recognised by its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is being systematically undermined by this Government's inaction.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we talk about Levuka, we just do not talk about Levuka itself, not Ovalau, but the Lomaiviti Group. Our heritage is not an aesthetic museum piece - it is a living economic asset and that requires strategic investment and thoughtful planning, neither of which has been forthcoming. We can talk all we want in Parliament, but nothing seems to be moving on the ground.

I have said this over and over again, that we need people of Levuka to be members of the World Heritage Council, but all the Council members are based in Suva and practically, do not understand the difficulties faced by the citizens of Levuka. This Government's failure to deliver on its commitment, is the single greatest betrayal of Levuka, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I moved a clear motion to allocate \$1 million specifically for the refurbishment of the key heritage buildings. I withdrew this motion only after receiving the honourable Prime Minister's direct personal assurance that his Office would find and release the necessary funds.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to-date, not one cent of the promised funds has reached Levuka. This means, our irreplaceable colonial-era buildings are left to decay, the very structures that underpin the town's World Heritage status and attracts tourists. By letting this asset crumble, the Government is deliberately destroying Levuka's core economic differentiator.

For Levuka's economy to thrive, we must recognise this unique limitation and provide targeted support, yet the honourable Minister has offered no tailored incentives whatsoever. I do not blame the current honourable Minister for this; however, this was the mess done by the former Minister for Finance, and now you are trying to fix the disarray.

The \$250,000 investment to qualify for tax holiday is not achievable, as most of the businesses operating in Levuka fall under micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). We need to bring the threshold down for the business community to take advantage of it. There are no specific tax rebate grants or conservation-linked subsidies to encourage private businesses to undertake costly, but necessary work to upgrade their premises while adhering to the stringent heritage conservation guidelines. Even the update of a minimum \$250,000 is needed to apply for tax rebate, and businesses in Levukado not have that type of cash flow because they do not have a huge population in Levuka.

Madam Deputy Speaker, businesses are unable to invest in expanding their capacity, be it accommodation, restaurant or niche retail market, meaning that the limited tourist dollar that do arrive often leak out to the local economy because the town cannot fully service the demand. The Government has failed to decentralise basic administrative functions, creating challenging obstacles for local businesses.

On the failed Planning Office, the proposal to establish a Town and Country Planning Office in Levuka was a necessary and a sensible step to facilitate development. It was part of the Standing Committee's recommendation. As a result, very simple pertinent inspection and development application requires Levuka's already struggling entrepreneurs to undertake costly and time-consuming travels to the mainland. This bureaucratic friction effectively acts as a non-traffic barrier to local economic growth, penalising the business community, simply for operating in a remote location.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Levuka's designation is due to its unique linear layout, nestled between the ocean and the cliff. This geography creates an acute problem that the Ministry must address - the absence of viable land for extension. There is no available space for construction of new modern buildings to house new businesses, diversify the local economy, or meet modern commercial standards.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister must present a comprehensive and immediate land use strategy that identifies areas for necessary, limited and carefully controlled expansion, perhaps through vertical development or reclaimed land that adheres strictly to UNESCO's conservation principles. Without space, the town's economy is permanently capped.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have spent millions of dollars to open a High Commission in Israel, and we cannot fork out \$1 million to assist the citizens of Levuka. It is a shame, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The honourable Minister for Finance, Business Development and Commerce is presiding over the decay of the World Heritage Site. We demand immediate action, the release of the promised \$1 million, the implementation of a local planning office, and introduction of targeted incentives to cater for MSMEs to revive Levuka's unique economy.

Giant Freshwater Prawn Broodstock –
Contribution to Blue Transformation of the Aquaculture Sector

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, viewers tuning in live on Parliament's Facebook page, ladies and gentlemen; *ni sa yadra vinaka.*

I rise to deliver a Statement regarding the importation of a new stock of genetically improved giant freshwater prawn, *Macrobrachium rosenbergii*, in November this year. Giant freshwater prawn is a species that is rapidly emerging as one of Fiji's most strategically important freshwater aquaculture commodity. It is one of the nine key species listed in the Aquaculture Development Plan 2024-2028 to be developed at the industry level.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the current broodstock has been used for the past 20 years. It has become commercially unviable due to the recycling of broodstock without genetic renewal, leading to slower growth, reduced reproductive output and higher feed requirements.

Aquaculture farming of any species, maintaining the level of genetic diversity, is a fundamental resource that influences its long-term productivity. Hence, to improve production and ensure the sustainable growth of the industry, broodstock should be replaced every three to five years.

With appropriate support, giant freshwater prawn can improve rural livelihoods, promote economic diversification, reduce our reliance on shrimp and prawn imports to support the tourism sector, and contribute significantly to national food and nutrition security. This species, *Macrobrachium rosenbergii*, or giant freshwater prawn, is not native to Fiji. It was introduced into Fiji from Tahiti in the 1980s for aquaculture research and development under a regional programme with the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to improve freshwater livelihood opportunities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a later introduction of new broodstocks in 2005, with the support of our partner, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), with a purpose

to promote development of the giant freshwater prawn in Fiji and the Pacific region, as a number of Pacific Island nations are looking to Fiji as a source of supply for giant freshwater prawn culture stocks and for assistance in developing their own aquaculture industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the species is native to Papua New Guinea and to other Southeast Asian countries such as India, Thailand, and Malaysia. The species that occur natively in Fiji's rivers and streams is *Macrobrachium la*, locally known as *ura*. It is of the same genus or family as the introduced giant freshwater prawn, which shares many fundamental characteristics, but is typically distinct, so they cannot interbreed to reproduce.

The giant freshwater prawn holds a distinguished position in global aquaculture for several reasons, as follows, each with direct implications for Fiji:

- (1) The species is renowned for its fast growth, which translates into economic efficiency and a promising commodity.
- (2) The species exhibits high fertility. A single mature female can produce between 80,000 eggs and more than 120,000 eggs per spawning, depending on her size and age.
- (3) It has high market value.
- (4) This prawn is naturally suited to Fiji's environmental conditions.
- (5) The demand for freshwater prawns is strong and expanding.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the development of the giant freshwater prawn supports the improvement of the Naduruloulou Research Station and the establishment and operation of the Galoa Aquaculture Centre. Currently, 110 giant freshwater prawn farmers exist, of which four are fully commercial farms with private hatcheries. The estimated production from these farms is around 25 metric tonnes and is valued at about FJ\$1.25 million.

With the support of our key partners, the research and development of this commodity has advanced to the commercial stage, with best practices implemented primarily through ongoing capacity building and staff training in broodstock and hatchery management.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries' Aquaculture Development Plan outlines strategies to transform Fiji's aquaculture industry. The introduction of a new genetic line of improved broodstock from an internationally recognised breeding programme is within the framework of the Aquaculture Development Plan.

In the first week of November this year, a total of 100 improved genetic broodstock was sourced from a certified commercial breeding centre in Thailand. With the support of SPC and the endorsement of Cabinet, the new broodstock was successfully imported into Fiji. This new broodstock offers –

- restored vitality with healthier, more vigorous animals;
- improved growth performance, enabling prawns to reach marketable size within a commercially acceptable timeframe;
- enhanced reproductive performance with strong reliable fertility; and
- it has high fertility levels, aligned with global standards, ensuring that we can produce sufficient post-larvae to support nationwide expansion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the first production cycle from this improved broodstock has already produced approximately 45,000 high-quality post-larvae distributed across three Government and four private hatcheries. This is an early but influential indication that the new genetic line is performing as expected.

Farmers in the Western, Northern and Central Divisions are now reactivating ponds that had been abandoned, planning new stocking schedules and investing, once again, in feed and pond maintenance, confident that the new post-larvae will perform better. We project that 50 to 60 farmers will be actively engaged in freshwater prawn farming within the next five months, with the potential to expand further as hatchery capacity grows.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this genetic upgrade means that Fiji's hatcheries can now fully exploit the species' natural reproductive strength, and ensure a continuous, predictable seed supply to farmers. This transformation is not happening in isolation. It directly supports Government's broad development agenda under the National Development Plan and Vision 2050, whereby it -

- contributes to job creation in hatcheries, farms, processing and logistics.
- contributes to import substitution, achieved by replacing imported prawns with domestic production.
- promotes rural empowerment by creating income opportunities across the islands, women and youth participation as the commodity is well suited to group-based and small-scale operations, climate-resilient livelihoods through inland control and diversified production systems, and expansion of Fiji's blue economy by adding high-value freshwater aquaculture to our economic portfolio.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the introduction of genetically improved freshwater prawn broodstock marks the opening of a new chapter for Fiji's freshwater aquaculture sector. The strategic direction and operational blueprint for the growth of the aquaculture sector are detailed in the Aquaculture Development Plan.

The Aquaculture Development Plan also translates national aspirations into concrete actions, budgets and performance targets. The strategic pillars include strengthening hatchery capacity, enhancing farmer support, improving market linkages, and advancing policy research and monitoring.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with improved post-larvae production, distribution and technical support from our partners, the giant freshwater prawn has the potential to increase production to 150 metric tonnes per year, valued at around \$5 million by 2028.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Aquaculture Bill 2024 passed in Parliament last year strengthens investment and growth in the aquaculture industry and provides a framework for responsible practices and sustainable development. The strategic approach to establishing public private partnerships and aquaculture cooperatives outlined in the Aquaculture Development Plan will maximise benefits to our farmers and provide solid access to financial facilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji has entered a new era for freshwater aquaculture. The combination of genetically improved giant freshwater prawn broodstock, a network of seven functioning hatcheries, robust alignment with the National Development Plan and Vision 2050, revived farmer confidence and participation, and a clear set of strategic directions for expansion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, all these places freshwater prawn aquaculture in a strong position to continue significantly to our blue economy and our overall national development. It is a story not only of scientific progress, but of perseverance, partnership and policy adherence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I take my seat, I would like to wish my husband, Aminiasi, a very happy and blessed birthday. I thank him for his support and love throughout the years.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- May I also offer my *kai* my best wishes on his birthday. I call upon the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak in reply.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry for her Statement this morning, covering the subject of genetically improved giant freshwater prawn, *Macrobrachium rosenbergii*, and its contribution to blue transformation of the aquaculture sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister has made a comprehensive statement where she highlighted, the:

- (1) overview and importance of importing genetically improved freshwater prawn;
- (2) rationale for new broodstock, the operational progress and results; and
- (3) directions for the future growth of our aquaculture sector in alignment with the National Development Plan and Vision 2050.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry for her timely and forward-looking statement on the importation of this genetically improved broodstock of giant freshwater prawns. The initiative marks a pivotal stride in the blue transformation of our aquaculture sector, an industry that holds immense promise for food security, economic diversification and rural empowerment.

The honourable Minister has rightly underscored the strategic importance of introducing new genetically superior broodstock. This is not merely a technical upgrade; it is a deliberate investment in the resilience and productivity of our aquatic food systems.

The rationale is clear. Our existing broodstock, while foundational, has reached its genetic ceiling. The introduction of improved lines selected for faster growth, high survival rates and disease resistance will catalyse the new era of aquaculture performance. It will enable our farmers to produce more, or reduced dependency on imports and meet rising domestic and regional demand for high value of protein.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am particularly encouraged by the operational progress that was outlined. The Ministry's coordination with research institutions, hatcheries and biosecurity agencies reflects a commendable level of diligence and foresight. This is how transformation is built, not through isolated intervention but through integrated systems that align science, policy and enterprise.

Looking ahead, the honourable Minister's emphasis on aligning aquaculture with our National Development Plan and Vision 2050 is prudent and inspiring. It signals that this is not a one-off project, but a cornerstone of our long-term strategy to build a sustainable, inclusive and innovation-driven blue economy.

Let me also highlight the broader implications. This initiative will generate employment across the aquaculture value chain from hatchery technicians to feed suppliers, processors and exporters. It will empower coastal and inland communities, especially women and youth to participate meaningfully in a sector that is increasingly knowledge-intensive and globally competitive.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the transformative is not a slogan; it is a discipline. It requires bold decisions, strategic investment and unwavering commitment. The honourable Minister's Statement today reflects all three. I urge this House to lend its full support to the Ministry's effort to ensure that the necessary resources, regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities are in place to sustain this momentum.

Let us seize this opportunity to position Fiji as a regional leader in sustainable aquaculture innovation. The tide is turning, and we must rise with it.

44th Pacific Islands Law Officers Network Annual General Meeting

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I proceed with my Ministerial Statement, I wish to take a moment to pay tribute to the late Mr. Amani Rokotuinaviti, former Resident Magistrate, from the *vanua* of Lutu, *yavusa* of Lutu and *mataqali* Lutu. He was 74 years old.

Mr. Rokotuinaviti was a dedicated civil servant. I believe he was a former teacher. I recall in 1988 when the Prime Minister visited the USP students, following the coup, he asked the Prime Minister, "Sir, I am studying Jokaravi. I do not want to be a teacher. I want to be a lawyer". I think a year or two after that, he went to Bond University to complete his law studies.

He was a legal mind of exceptional caliber, who served between the early 2000s until 2009 when the Judicial Officers were dismissed. He was a man who committed his life to serving the nation with humility, diligence and integrity.

His passing is a great loss to the legal fraternity, to the education sector and to Fiji. On behalf of the Office of the Attorney-General and the Ministry of Justice, I extend our deepest condolences to his family, the *Vanua* of Lutu, colleagues and loved ones. We acknowledge his immense contribution to nation-building, and we honour his legacy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to update this august House on the outcome of the 44th annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON), held from 28th October to 30th October, 2025, at APEC Haus in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Madam Deputy Speaker, PILON is more than a professional gathering - it is a family of Pacific Law Officers of Attorney-Generals, Solicitor-Generals, Director of Public Prosecutions and senior legal leaders, united by a shared purpose to strengthen justice, uphold the rule of law and ensure our people are protected by systems that are fair, modern and responsible.

This year, the Government of Papua New Guinea hosted the gathering under the Chairmanship of Dr. Eric Kwa, who succeeded Fiji's own Solicitor-General, Mr. Ropate Green Lomavatu. The honourable James Marape, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, opened the meeting, reminding participants that the law must always remain a servant of the people. He spoke passionately about the need to address gender-based violence, corruption, cybercrime, environmental harm, and he challenged them to ensure that Pacific laws reflect Pacific values and not foreign templates.

Over the three days, discussions were rich, honest and forward-looking. Madam Deputy Speaker, PILON continues to prioritise four major areas - combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), addressing corruption, tackling cybercrime and strengthening legislative drafting.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji's progress in modernising its cybercrime laws and aligning with the Budapest Convention was acknowledged. Fiji remains active in the Cybercrime Working Group, which is developing a Regional Cybercrime Legislation Implementation Handbook. Further meetings are planned for 2026. The Working Group's 2026 Work Plan was endorsed in that meeting.

I wish to highlight an achievement that holds deep significance for Fiji and the region. In September, the Office of the Attorney-General, through our Legislative Drafting Division, co-

organised the first-ever Pacific Legislative Drafters Steering Committee Conference in partnership with PILON, with support from the Australian Attorney-General's Department. Fiji proudly hosted this historical gathering from 9th September to 11th September at Tanoa International Hotel in Nadi under the powerful theme, "Developing Laws in the Pacific by the Pacific for the Pacific".

This Conference marked a turning point. For decades, Pacific countries relied heavily on external legislative models. Through this first meeting, we asserted ownership of our legal identity. We affirmed that Pacific nations can draw laws that speak our language, reflect our realities, and uphold our values.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Conference and subsequent two-day workshop covered important topics, including:

- (1) policy development to legislated outcomes;
- (2) working with stakeholders for drafting instructions to develop legislation;
- (3) drafting the Pacific challenges and opportunities;
- (4) sentences and words in law; and
- (5) developing core competencies through training, office management and resources.

Legislative drafters from Nauru, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Tokelau, Fiji, as well as PILON and the Australian Attorney-General participated. Participants engaged with senior drafters from New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel, the Australian Federal Office of Parliamentary Counsel, the Commonwealth Association of Legislative Counsel, and the honourable Attorney-General of Tonga.

Madam Cassie Nicholson, Chief Parliamentary Counsel and Chief Executive of New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel, recently appointed to King's Counsel, also delivered keynote remarks. The unity and energy during the Conference reaffirmed that Pacific legal officers are contributors and innovators, shaping the legal future grounded in our identity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji's leadership was further recognised through the Pacific Legislative Drafters Committee. The Conference reinforced the importance of Pacific driven lawmaking, rooted in our cultural and linguistic diversity.

Updates that were received from the working group, include:

- trauma-informed initiatives;
- a Regional Webinar series on interviewing child witnesses; and
- the Revival of Witness Support Officers Network.

The Working Group's 2026 workplan was also endorsed.

Under Fiji's chairmanship, the following achievements were recorded:

- (1) the publication of the first PLDC Annual Circular, highlighting Micronesian drafters, with the Melanesian edition underway;
- (2) continued implementation of the regional guidelines for prosecutors and witness support officers; and
- (3) Fiji's hosting of the Regional Asset Seizure and Confiscation Workshop in February 2025 with 15 PILON member countries.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the important work between the Fiji Government and the Office of the Attorney-General, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in developing Fiji's Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) Manual and supplementary protocols. These tools will support central authorities, prosecutors, investigators and agencies involved in international cooperation.

As transnational crime becomes more sophisticated, strong MLA procedures are essential. The manual will provide clarity on processes, timelines, legal requirements and best practices, enabling Fiji to meet its obligations under the International Conventions and support domestic investigations. It also prepares Fiji for Asia/Pacific Group (APG) Mutual Evaluation next year.

Fiji also co-hosted a regional workshop on Asset Seizure and Confiscation in Nadi with UNODC and the Australian Attorney-General's Department. Madam Deputy Speaker, 27 prosecutors, law enforcement officers and legal officers attended from 15 PILON member countries. These regional engagements highlighted that no jurisdiction can combat transnational crimes alone. Strengthening networks, harmonising processes, and building capacity are essential for regional safety.

Fiji remains committed to deepening cooperation, enhancing institutional capacity, and ensuring that our systems are equipped to address modern, transnational and cyber-enabled crime. Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji also draws inspiration from the recent ICJ advisory opinion, which affirms that States have binding obligations to prevent climate harm and may be held accountable if they fail to do so.

This principle extends to the digital realm. Just as States must prevent climate harm, they must also protect human rights in cyberspace. This is especially important for Fiji as we expand digital services. Greater connectivity brings greater exposure to cyber risk. This issue has also been raised by the Pacific Nations with the UN Open-Ended Working Group on ICT.

Fiji, through the Office of the Attorney-General, is developing a national position paper on international law in cyberspace. The ICJ opinion strengthens our approach and informs our legal direction. It reminds us that whether in the physical or digital world, States must act with responsibility, foresight and commitment.

Members also discussed strengthening law and justice institutions, improving access to justice, enhancing digital evidence systems, and protecting vulnerable witnesses. Fiji shared updates on reforms under the Law and Justice Sector Roadmap.

Madam Deputy Speaker, PILON members agreed to adopt a new Strategic Plan for 2027 to 2029, with discussions continuing to 2026 on working group consolidation and elevating climate change as a strategic priority. The next annual meeting will be co-hosted by Tuvalu in Australia in 2026, followed by Solomon Islands in 2027, and Niue in 2028.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji remains deeply committed to PILON. Law and justice form the pillars of peace, stability and progress in our region. Through PILON, we strengthen institutions, we uphold integrity, and we ensure justice is never out of reach for any Pacific islander. Fiji stands ready to continue leading, supporting, and uplifting the Pacific legal community.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I call upon the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to reply.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the Acting Attorney-General and Minister for Justice for his Ministerial Statement this morning on the Pacific Islands Legal

Officers Network. I think it is important that the momentum we have gathered with PILON continues, especially in light of the fact that we need to ensure that a lot of the things that we do nowadays, we have the region in mind.

This is one of the institutions that actually carries a lot of weight. We have a lot of good members on it, including Australia and New Zealand. The matters that were being discussed in the PNG meeting are actually very important and have to do with the current landscape. I think Fiji leads, especially when we are talking about cybersecurity, we are talking about sexual and gender-based violence, we are talking about corruption, and one of the big elephants in the room for all of us is legislative drafting.

It is an institution where we can gather a lot of experience from, gather a lot of assistance from, and ideas with respect to how to move forward in order to ensure that we align ourselves with all that we signed up for in terms of the charter that exists at PILON.

Madam Deputy Speaker, because it is a network for all our senior law officers in the Pacific, it is a place where we share the expertise, and we exchange experiences. We had the chairmanship, and our Solicitor-General, Mr. Ropate Green, was actually the previous Chair at the conference here in Fiji. It is there for us to advance the key law and justice issues that face all of our regional neighbours.

It is not just about the law, there are many things now that we must look at, and we need to enlist the help of and also get the ideas from, and it should include our neighbours. I know we have spoken about this at the Pacific Island's Forum, about getting things done regionally. If you look at our regional neighbours, they have gone and gotten a decision out of the ICJ with respect to climate change and that is so important, and we should all be proud of it in terms of how it was done. It is an important message to the rest of the world that the region can get things done.

I know this happens also in the Caribbean. When we do go to conferences outside of Fiji, it is an important thing that we present a Pacific and a regional front, and these institutions form the backbone of what we actually are all facing in terms of climate change, in terms of sexual and gender-based violence, et cetera. One of the ugly parts about it is that it is something that needs to be dealt with and we all have to face it – the corruption, et cetera. All in all, I think a commendable conference that occurred in Papua New Guinea. Again, the bigger players in the region - Australia and New Zealand, being a part of the Conference is actually important in terms of all those things that we are lacking.

I hope the honourable Attorney-General continues to hammer the table on this. It is the legislative drafting issue that I think everyone faces in the region, especially in light of the fact that the entire landscape with respect to the law and what we face as problems nowadays - transnational crimes, AI, et cetera, is changing. These institutions form the backbone of what we can do, achieve and get done with respect to our law and justice at the end of the day.

It is a comparison also for us in terms of how justice is taken care of in all our regions. Maybe, we are doing something wrong, maybe we are doing a lot right, but I know this for a fact that the region looks at us to lead the way in many things, and this is one institution where they do so. I think it is important that we are on top of the game when we are attending these conferences. So, hats off to the Solicitor-General for attending and the honourable Attorney-General for attending to it.

I do not seem to see the Fiji report at the moment, honourable Attorney-General, maybe it was presented. All the other countries have done it. I do not seem to see it online either. Hopefully, we can actually see that, as well as the outcomes. I know the honourable Attorney-General has given

us a short brief on it, but with respect to outcomes, maybe he can pass that on to us at a later stage.

Commercial Pineapple Shipment to New Zealand

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; *ni sa bula vinaka*. I rise to share an achievement that embodies the very best of Fiji's agriculture, enterprise, and national ambition. This is the story of our pineapple and how it has become a symbol of what we can accomplish when Government, industries, stakeholders, and communities unite behind a bold vision.

What was once a simple crop grown on small farms, plots, has now blossomed into one of Fiji's emerging commodities for export. Madam Deputy Speaker, pineapple grows best in the Western Division and the drier side of Vanua Levu – an environment where sugarcane grows best.

In the last decades, pineapple's contribution to our real GDP fluctuated. However, with patience, investment, and innovation, the compound annual growth trend has been rising steadily. This is agriculture in motion - resilient, adaptive, and growth-oriented.

In Fiji's field, there are two predominant commercial pineapple varieties – the Smooth Cayenne and the Ripley Queen. We also have small acreages of Veimama variety. Most farmers are planting Ripley Queen. It is sweet and meets overseas market standards.

The main driving force to this milestone shipment was the first National Agricultural Mini-Trade Forum, co-hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries, the Pacific Trade Investment, with generous support from Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Plus Programme (PHAMA Plus) and Australia's DFAT.

On 5th November, 2025, under very close collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand, and our valued private-sector, Fiji successfully exported three tonnes of Ripley Queen pineapple to New Zealand. I wish to thank all who have contributed to this successful journey.

Three tonnes is a very small volume, but every thorn removed, and every crate palletised represents months of hard work, precise quality control, and unwavering belief in our product. What is encouraging now, is that the New Zealand market is demanding for our pineapples.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Brix scale is used to measure Total Soluble Solids (TSS) content of fruits. Brix values are used as an indicator of crop quality, which is crucial for quality in export markets. Pineapples require a minimum Brix scale of 12, to meet the export standards, and our Ripley Queen pineapple's Brix scale ranges from 12 to 16, producing exceptional quality and natural sweetness.

From policy dialogue to hands-on technical training, from real-time market intelligence to logistics coordination, every component of the value chain was strengthened by public-private collaboration, and the following were all part of this success:

- Farmers' commitment to best agricultural practices;
- BAF's vigorous inspections and clearances;
- local exporters' market expertise;
- Fiji Airways' reliable cargo services;
- freight forwarders; and
- product presentations on supermarket shelves.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our pineapples fulfilled the stringent biosecurity and phytosanitary requirements set by the New Zealand Authorities. This was achieved through –

- integrated pest, disease and sanitary management protocols;
- post-harvest handling processes to preserve freshness; and
- approved packaging materials and traceability from field to market.

Such discipline in quality assurance is not a luxury - it is a prerequisite for sustainable access to premium markets.

What does this successful trial shipment mean for our country?

- It unlocks new market opportunities in New Zealand and creates a springboard to enter into other markets in Asia and beyond.
- It strengthens bilateral trade relations with key strategic partners.
- It expands income streams for our rural farmers, lifting entire communities through increased farm gate revenues.
- It underscores our commitment to sustainable farming, responsible land stewardship, and inclusive growth.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we monitor consumer feedback, sales data and logistical efficiency in the weeks and months ahead, rest assured that our Ministry will continue to provide:

- (1) strengthened research and development to address market quality requirements and minimised losses;
- (2) infrastructure investments to upgrade packing sheds, cold rooms, and support transport networks;
- (3) market intelligence services to guide exporters on pineapple pricing trends, consumer preferences, and regulatory changes; as well as
- (4) capacity building and cooperative farming model structures.

In partnership with Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand, we are now working on developing a premium brand identity for Fiji pineapple, with a 12-month marketing strategy. This will encompass brand development, consumer insights, digital marketing campaigns, in-store activations, and public relations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our Crop Extension Division is refining a long-term cultivation plan for the next five to ten years, aligning agronomic interventions with production goals. The Crop Research Division is scaling up the propagation of high-health yield plant materials, while the Land Resource Planning & Development Division is mapping existing and prospective pineapple farms. Together, these initiatives lay the groundwork for a more robust and more resilient industry capable of sustaining export growth.

To our brothers and sisters in New Zealand, I say this:

- Buy and enjoy your Fiji pineapple.
- We are working on your Fiji banana.
- We are also working on your Fiji mangoes.
- We are also working on your Fiji *sasalu*.

I will also kindly request that:

- be our eyes and our ears;
- tell us what and how we can improve our services;
- how we can improve our quality; and
- come and invest in Fiji and grow our sector together.

I thank our farmers, BAF, importers, exporters, logistics and transporters, New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries, Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand, Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Plus Programme (PHAMA) Plus, Australia's DFAT, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways staff for their tireless efforts and unwavering support.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, for their response.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for a comprehensive Ministerial Statement on the recent commercial pineapple shipment to New Zealand. I must commend the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and its staff, and the hard-working farmers who have toiled hard and finally have our dreams realised in terms of our first trial commercial shipment to New Zealand.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the pineapple industry in Fiji started way back in the 1860s. A significant development of commercialisation occurred when packaging operations commenced in December 1930.

In the last two years, Fiji has produced 8,950.8 metric tonnes of fresh pineapples. However, much of the crop volume has been consumed locally, particularly by our tourism sector. With the positive feedback by the New Zealand consumers, I hope that the Ministry of Agriculture will continue its momentum and address the challenges and development initiatives. Some of the major challenges include inconsistent supply, quality control issues and strict biosecurity requirement for export markets. We do hope, that the honourable Minister would have set a high-power taskforce to address the challenges.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in regard to the development initiatives, the Ministry must look into providing assistance and capacity building to address best farming practices and market access, training workshops to be conducted for agriculture officers and farmers to improve husbandry and off-season production techniques. We do hope that the Ministry will continue to support the establishment of fruit orchards that is aimed at providing quality fruits to the tourism industry and export market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with market potential in New Zealand identified and formalised, and market dynamics in favour of Fijian pineapple which currently leads at a higher price point compared to pineapple from major suppliers, like Philippines and Ecuador - our importers are reportedly paying NZ\$7 for Fijian pineapple.

We sincerely hope that the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to support the Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) that is aimed at promoting the better use of idle land, *iTaukei* land for agriculture production, and incentives for landlords and tenants. That will attract more potential pineapple farmers.

It gives subsidies on fertilisers and pesticides, or land preparation for the current and new pineapple farmers and give further training to our agricultural officers so that the advocacy of pineapple production can be done throughout the non-sugar and sugar producing areas to entice more rural youth into farming. This will ensure that we maintain a healthy and steady supply of our Fijian

pineapples, so that we do not lose our New Zealand market, and at the same time, tap into new and remote market access.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we can proudly say that the pineapple industry in Fiji is a key agricultural sector that contributes significantly to the local economy. The production is sufficient to meet both, domestic and export demands.

I thank the Government and the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways in his collaboration with the private sector, who is now actively working to boost production and enhance value-adding and processing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is good to know that the honourable Minister is also exploring banana production. I hope that he will concentrate in the Waidina banana too.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it is around 12.19 p.m. now. I understand that there are a couple of meetings happening at 12.30 p.m. today, so I am going to break for lunch now, and I am going to ask that we come back at 2.30 p.m. The Parliament is now adjourned until the bell rings.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.19 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, join me in warmly welcoming the students and the teachers of Navatu Primary School, and I have to clarify that this is Navatu in Ra.

(Acclamation)

On behalf of all the honourable Members, I warmly welcome you to Parliament, and I hope that this visit will deepen your appreciation of its working and offer meaningful insights into the vital role Parliament plays in shaping and safeguarding our democracy. Once again, *ni sa yadra vinaka! Ara na yadra!* Welcome to your Parliament and thank you for joining us today.

We will continue from where we left off, honourable Members, and I now call on the Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs to deliver his Ministerial statement.

Update on the Internal Reconciliation Process by RFMF

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Cabinet Ministers, honourable Members of this House, and also in a special way I join you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in welcoming our *turaga* and *marama mataqali* from Navatu, Ra. We hope that you will enjoy your time with us here in Parliament today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to provide the House with an update on the reconciliation process undertaken by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). This initiative is entirely internal to the institution and reflects its decision to examine its history, internal culture, and the consequences of its past actions on different communities across Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the RFMF recognises that stable service to the nation requires a clear understanding of its own past. The institution has, therefore, begun by looking inward. It is assessing the events that shaped its identity and the internal attitudes that developed over the decades. This work is necessary for the RFMF to operate with consistency, discipline and accuracy in understanding its constitutional responsibilities.

At the centre of this effort are structured internal consultations involving former and current personnel, families and individuals affected by the events of 1987, 2000 and 2006. These conversations have provided the RFMF with direct accounts of harm, disruption and long-term impacts experienced by different groups. This process assists the institution to identify areas where internal systems must be improved and where historical assumptions require correction.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the RFMF has acknowledged that the Indo-Fijian community experienced substantial and lasting consequences arising from the events of 1987. These consequences extended beyond immediate disruptions. Many Indo-Fijian families faced prolonged uncertainty about their safety, livelihoods and their long-term place in the country. Some relocated overseas, whilst others remained, but carried an ongoing sense of insecurity that influenced many family decisions, employment choices and community relationships.

The RFMF recognises that these impacts did not conclude with the passing of time. They form part of the lived history of the Indo-Fijian community and remain embedded in Fiji's collective memory. The institution has accepted that an incredible reconciliation process must engage these realities directly. It also understands that approaching the Indo-Fijian community requires a method that is practical, respectful and sustained.

The RFMF is aware that the circumstances surrounding 1987, 2000 and 2006 were complex. They involved political forces, social tensions, historical grievances and institutional decisions that intersected in ways that cannot be reduced to a single narrative. This complexity means that no single gesture, whether symbolic or administrative, can address the whole range of experiences carried by Indo-Fijian families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the RFMF is, therefore, considering a structured approach that balances cultural sensitivity with practical engagement. This includes identifying appropriate community representatives, consulting individuals who lived through the period, and documenting the accounts in a manner that accurately reflects the range of experiences that occurred. The RFMF is exploring how it might frame an acknowledgment of harm that avoids generalisation and reflects the diversity of circumstances experienced within the Indo-Fijian community.

The institution is also examining what form a request for forgiveness might take. It understands that such a step must not be symbolic alone. It must be based on clear understanding, proper preparation and engagement that is meaningful for those who receive it. This may involve community-level discussions, written acknowledgments, or structured cultural processes analogous in intent to the *Matanigasau* presented to the Great Council of Chiefs, adapted appropriately for the Indo-Fijian community's cultural context. The RFMF's primary concern is to ensure that any approach is guided by accuracy, dignity, and a realistic understanding of what communities consider genuine.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this work is still in its early stages. The RFMF is collecting information, developing a clearer picture of what occurred and identifying the methods through which it can approach the Indo-Fijian community, in a way that is proportionate to the scale of the harm experienced. The institution's aim is to establish a path that recognises past actions with honesty, and that provides families with an opportunity to receive acknowledgment in a manner that supports long-term national cohesion.

The objective is clarity. The RFMF does not seek symbolic actions without substance. It seeks to identify approaches that allow the institution to present itself honestly, acknowledge the effect of its past actions, and ask for forgiveness in a manner that is meaningful for families who lived through the period. The RFMF understands that these engagements must be consistent, and they must be built on facts, not assumptions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, an example of the institution taking responsibility in a structured and culturally appropriate manner is the *Matanigasau* presented to the Bose Levu Vakaturaga or the Great Council of Chiefs. Through this step, the RFMF acknowledged its past actions and their consequences on Fiji's traditional leadership structure. This was one component of a broader internal process.

While the *matanigasau* does not resolve all historical issues. It demonstrates the institution's willingness to confront its past openly and to engage respectfully with national institutions affected by its actions. This model of acknowledgment is informing the RFMF's consideration of how it may approach the Indo-Fijian community in a manner that is equally practical and appropriate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the RFMF is also examining its historic involvement in political affairs. The institution accepts that its actions in the past decades contributed to instability. It is now reviewing how its responsibilities are defined under the Constitution, and determining what internal adjustments are required for it to operate as a professional defence institution under civilian authority. This involves reassessing command systems, leadership expectations, and internal decision-making structures to ensure consistency with modern defence standards.

To describe this phase of work, we must think of it as 'clearing a lens'. The institution remains the military force of the State. What it seeks is a clearer understanding of itself. Over time, the lens through which the RFMF viewed its role in history became clouded by unexamined assumptions, internal tensions, and legacies of conflict. By clearing this lens through structured reflection, acknowledgment of past actions, and engagement with affected communities, the RFMF aims to gain an accurate picture of its responsibilities. A clearer internal lens allows the institution to function with fewer distortions and with greater stability.

The RFMF has already implemented adjustments based on this reflection. This includes strengthening support services, improving internal discussions on discipline and conduct, and expanding direct engagements with families of individuals affected by past events. It has also reaffirmed that behaviours linked to previous instability must not be repeated or permitted to influence current or future operations. Never again, Madam Deputy Speaker, should any one citizen of Fiji, or otherwise, use the RFMF as a means of political advantage.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this internal reconciliation process is not designed to reinterpret history - it is a factual assessment intended to ensure that future decisions are based on an accurate understanding rather than inherited assumptions. The RFMF has taken the view that it cannot carry unresolved internal issues into its future role. Addressing those issues now strengthens the institution's ability to serve with clarity, consistency, and respect for all communities affected by Fiji's past periods of instability.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government will continue to observe the RFMF's reconciliation process with care. This does not mean, directing its internal work, nor does it mean remaining distant from it. The Government recognises that the RFMF must lead its own reflection.

However, the Government also has a responsibility to ensure that any institutional process related to national stability occurs within a framework that upholds the Constitution, respects the rights of all citizens, and supports unity across communities. For this reason, Government's involvement will be limited to areas where it supports and strengthens transparency, enhances professional standards, or ensures that the RFMF's work remains aligned with national expectations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, national stability remains the primary priority. Fiji has experienced the consequences of instability before. The Government is, therefore, focused on ensuring that the RFMF's internal process does not introduce uncertainty, but instead contributes to a stronger and more predictable security environment. Stability requires disciplined institutions. It also requires institutions that understand their past with clarity. The Government views the RFMF's reconciliation process as an opportunity to reinforce these conditions.

Institutional accountability is also central. As the State's defence institution, the RFMF holds significant responsibility. Its internal processes must, therefore, meet a high standard of accuracy, honesty and completeness.

The Government will ensure that any outcomes presented publicly are factual and are supported by proper internal documentation. The Government may also assist in developing structures, such as professional development pathways, reformed internal reporting systems, or improved welfare and counselling frameworks that embed accountability and reduce the likelihood of future instability.

Madam Deputy Speaker, fairness to all communities remains an essential component of this work. The effects of Fiji's previous conflicts were not uniform. Different groups experienced

different forms of harm. The Indo-Fijian community experienced long-term consequences following the events of 1987, and the *iTaukei* communities and others also faced their own pressures during the later periods.

The Government's role is to ensure that no community is overlooked in the RFMF's internal reconciliation process, that engagements are grounded in accuracy, and any steps taken towards acknowledgement or forgiveness are guided by fairness rather than selective emphasis.

This balanced approach, careful oversight, practical support and a clear focus on stability, accountability and fairness, creates an environment where the RFMF can carry out its internal work without external pressure, but with consistent alignment to national expectations and the long-term interests of all our Fijian people.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I call on the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, for their reply.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement in addressing the internal reconciliation process currently undertaken by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). I do agree with the honourable Minister and acknowledge the leadership of the RFMF, the men and women, for such initiative, and we wish them well in the continuation of this process.

The RFMF, as we all know, and as stated by the honourable Minister, was involved in its historic involvement in political affairs of the past that affected stability, and to some extent, the security of our people and the country as well. I, for one, lived through almost all these upheavals.

I was an Officer Cadet in 1987. I was a Company Commander in 2000. The honourable Minister and I were in Staff College in 2006 when the events of 2006 happened, and then we came back, got promoted as Unit Commanders and served in the ranks as well. This is an institution that helped in shaping and moulding us to be the people we are today. There are a lot, across both sides of the floor, who were brought up by this institution.

As I have stated, this internal reconciliation process is duly acknowledged and, again, I wish to convey our appreciation to the Commander of the RFMF. It comes at a critical time in our history and democratic journey. It is a show of humility and respect and, again, I thank the Commander and the men and women of the RFMF for doing so. The honourable Minister has given us a clear outline of what has taken place and the ongoing consideration and future plans they have in order to complete the process.

Honourable Minister, I appeared before the Reconciliation Committee of the RFMF as well, and I will end my response with the same question that I asked them. You have stated that never again should anyone use the RFMF for political advantage, and the question I raised then with the Committee is, will you be involved in the national reconciliation process?

We understand that this is going parallel with the national reconciliation process, and I hope that you will be involved as well because as you have correctly stated, honourable Minister, about the historic involvement in political affairs. We have said it once and we will say it again today, because in revolutions, you can. The military is the means, politics is the objective. They have presented their *matanigasau* to the Great Council of Chiefs, but the question remains; who are the politicians or who are the figures behind 1987? Who are the figures behind 2000?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Who are the figures behind 2006?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as currently being undertaken, is concentrating on the victims and the reconciliation process rather than the truth-telling, and this is something that we need to address. We have said it when we deliberated on the Truth and Reconciliation Bill - let us do this once and let us do it right. So, the truth-telling is a key component of the Truth and Reconciliation process, and that is why we are urging the RFMF, if personnel who were involved can also be involved in the Truth and Reconciliation process.

I have also stated my concerns about the removal of the summoning power that was then with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and that is confirmed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in their advertisement on 8th December in *The Fiji Times*.

If I may just read that out, Madam Deputy Speaker, in paragraph two, it states, and I quote:

“Crucial to the Commission's work is the conduct of hearings, either public or private, where the survivors or/and witnesses are provided with a safe space to share their testimonies. The Commission does not have the power to summon but can examine witnesses under oath.”

I am urging the Government, and I am urging the RFMF, the participation of RFMF personnel and also the civilians who have been released from prison, if they can participate in the truth-telling. If we do not address this issue now, when will we address it? Let us move the country forward.

I hope that the Government will look into this, and I hope that the honourable Minister can provide some directions to the RFMF so that they can participate in the national reconciliation process.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will proceed to the next item on the Order Paper. Please, take note that Oral Question No. 363/2025 has been dropped from the Order Paper as this subject has been addressed through the Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Finance earlier today.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Allowances for Teachers and Non-Teaching Staff
(Question No. 335/2025)

HON. H. CHAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I ask the question, I would like to congratulate all the Year 8 Students for completing primary education. I wish them well in their secondary education.

My question is:

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament whether allowances, including acting allowances for teachers and non-teaching staff, are paid in a timely manner?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, at the outset, I was thinking that this

question should never have made it because public information available. As a former Director Human Resources in the Ministry of Education, he is well aware of the current situation.

The payment of acting allowances for teachers, yes, we are doing that. At times, there will be some delays because of verification purposes, and that is nothing new - something that has always been the case in terms of acting allowances for acting positions. Given that those who have been acting in the positions for quite some time have been paid, but because of the delays in the responses or advice that has been given, it also has taken time to pay the acting allowance. If there are instances of staff having concerns brought to your attention, Sir, or if you have been advised internally, please bring it to our attention.

HON. H. CHAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this information regarding the non-payment of acting allowance is not publicly available. This is current issue, that is why I am asking. If allowances, including acting allowance, are not paid in time, the staff morale will be low, and it will negatively impact the Ministry of Education by decreasing productivity.

I have been informed that some staff at headquarters have not been paid acting allowance, even some teachers who are acting are yet to receive their acting allowance. My question to the honourable Minister is why are acting allowances not been paid to staff? What is causing the delay?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I have just answered those questions. The allowance has been paid. For those who have not been paid their allowance, there is a process that needs to be followed, and we have to ensure that allowance has been paid to the right person. As the honourable Member is aware, there are instances where payments have been continuing for ghost employees in the Ministry of Education. This is something that we would not like to happen again, going forward.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a background to the question. From the article I received from a staff member of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance has set aside \$11.8 million in overtime payments for established and unestablished Civil Servants in the 2025-2026 financial year. So, that is good news for the Civil Servants who are working overtime.

The question to the Minister is, one of the drivers at the Ministry of Education has raised a concern with me that he has not been paid allowance for the last three months. Can the honourable Minister provide a timeline on when that will be paid out?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the question is becoming operational in nature. However, if you can give us the details because there are a lot of processes that need to be followed prior to the payment of allowance. First, overtime needs to be approved. If it is not approved, then the overtime becomes illegal. That is the process that needs to be verified. If you can provide the details of the person who is giving you the information, rather than just generalising without any specific details.

HON. A.A MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for the comprehensive answer that he gave and I feel pity for the Minister in trying to justify the non-performance of his staff.

My simple question to the honourable Minister is now that he has confirmed that there are a lot of acting positions in the Ministry of Education, particularly since he was a very strong critic when he was a member of the Public Accounts Committee, when people used to act on certain positions, can he confirm as to when all these acting positions are going to be confirmed?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, most of these acting positions were

there during his time when he was the Assistant Minister for Labour. He did not take the initiative to process all those acting positions. We have to do the advertisement.

As you might be aware, as a former Acting Assistant Minister for Labour, processes have to be followed. You cannot just confirm a position. There are some processes that were undertaken to confirm these positions, and also there were existing people because some have migrated or have left for greener pastures, creating positions that are needed to be advertised as per OMRS to fill in the positions.

Visa and Work Permit Processing Times
(Question No. 336/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Immigration inform Parliament on any specific improvements in visa and work permit processing times, resulting from the immigration policy changes implemented over the past year?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank honourable Vakalalabure for the question. He is a former Assistant Minister for Immigration and understands the connection of the work that we do at immigration with economic prosperity, and also the connection to upholding our security at our borders and the need to be efficient when we process our visas and permits because of that reason. Not only fast but making sure that security is not compromised in the process.

Perhaps, for a refresher, a visa gives a person the mobility right to travel from wherever they are to Fiji and enter the country. There are 80 countries in the world that require pre-entry visas to Fiji out of the 195 countries. A permit authorises a person to conduct an activity and reside in Fiji. So, you can have a permit to work and reside, to study and reside, to invest and reside in Fiji. These are the two - visa and permit, are services that the Ministry conducts for non-citizens. The services that we conduct for Fiji citizens are mainly around the issuing of passports.

For visa, Madam Deputy Speaker, we set a standard time of 14 days from the date of payment to when they receive the feedback from us. One of the systems that was introduced in 2024 was the Document Management System (DMS) and now, the visa system has been migrated to this system, it is now much faster and can even be turned around in a day if the documents that are provided are in order. That is for the visa.

For permits, the processing time from the date of payment of the fee is 21 days. We try as much as we can to be within that timeframe. In some cases, we take a little bit longer, if documents are not in order, and we go back and forth with the applicants. In some cases, it is much faster if everything is provided on time.

I was googling Australia, where the shortest timeframe for any visa is one to three months and for a Work Visa for skilled personnel is about 18 months. We try and do it in 21 days, and we try, all the time, to be efficient. We know how important it is for companies here in Fiji that want to employ foreigners to come over and work.

Development of Water Treatment Plant
(Question No. 337/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament whether there are plans for the development of a water treatment plant in Nalawa, Ra, to ease water problems along Navesau Secondary School to Madhuvani in Ra?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The plans to address water supply challenges in the Nalawa area, including Navesau Secondary School through to Madhuvani in Ra is embedded within the Water Sector Strategy 2050, which is specifically identified from the previous 2019 Korovou to Rakiraki Water Supply Master Plan and 2019 Rakiraki Water Master Plan.

Under these plans, the proposed Dakuivuna Scheme will establish a new water treatment plant, drawing from Dakuivuna Creek. This facility is intended to serve the southern end of the Korovou-Rakiraki reticulation gap and extend northwards to include Navesau Adventist High School and surrounding communities.

The Rakiraki Master Plan further outlines measures to strengthen supply to the northern end of the reticulation gap, which include upgrades to existing intake and pumping infrastructure, sourcing additional water from the Penang River and constructing raw water storages to supplement dry season intake. Further supply options would also consider sourcing from the Wainibuka River. I have made initial discussions and had a look at the proposed site with relevant landowner representatives. Subsequent to this, further discussions have been held with the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) in terms of feasibility.

Looking ahead, even with the improved non-revenue water management, demand beyond the current 20 Year planning horizon will necessitate additional interventions such as the expanded raw water storage, new sources at Wainibuka, as I have mentioned, and potential desalination, including solar desalination.

In addition to what I had mentioned, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is undertaking a diagnostic study focussing on strengthening climate resilience for rural infrastructure, including water and sanitation. This study encompasses seven rural clusters across Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, one of which is the Matawailevu-Barotu Cluster in Ra. Preliminary assessments for this cluster is aligned with the Korovou-Rakiraki master plan and proposed sourcing from the Wainibuka River.

The AIIB and GGGI have expressed interest in supporting feasibility studies, concept and detailed designs and construction works for these proposals, which we are progressing. They have also indicated their willingness to fund the existing Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) projects identified in the Water Sector Strategy 2050 that will deliver tangible benefits to communities within these clusters.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call upon honourable Alvick Lal; Alvick Maharaj, I beg your pardon, to ask his question. I apologise, honourable Alvick.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No worries, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know we are the naughty ones these days, but we have not changed our names.

Current Average Wait Time for Specialist Appointment
(Question No. 339/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the current national average wait time for specialist appointments and the Ministry's funded plan to recruit sufficient specialist medical practitioners over the next 12 months?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. In terms of the current national average waiting time for specialist appointment is closely linked to the availability of qualified specialists and the recruitment processes.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services employs through the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection Process (OMRS), to fill specialist positions as it does for all other vacant roles, and in the OMRS guideline, the requirement for successful recruiting and selecting post-holders is within 4 months of the advertisement's closing date.

At present, 80 percent of the 99 specialist positions are filled, while 20 percent remain vacant with the highest vacancies in Chief Medical Officer post at 29 percent. A significant challenge arises from the lack of suitable and qualified candidates which can delay the filling of specialist positions, and in such cases, these positions are often re-advertised.

For the past five years, recruitment has improved significantly. For example, in 2021, only 52 percent of advertised specialist positions were filled within 4 months, and 48 percent had to be re-advertised. By 2025, 83 percent of positions were filled within 4 months, and re-advertisement dropped to 17 percent, reflecting better strategies and candidate availability.

The Ministry has a funded plan for the approved doctor's budget of \$82.4 million for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. In addition to paying salaries to all field doctor positions, we continue to advertise and recruit specialists for all vacant positions as they arise within the next 12 months and continue succession planning allowing acting appointments to maintain service delivery, while candidates complete specialist registration.

We also engage locum specialists where necessary and specialist distributions by field currently stands as follows:

- (1) internal medicine - 11 specialists;
- (2) anaesthesia - 9 specialists;
- (3) obstetrics & gynaecology - 8 specialists;
- (4) general surgery - 6 specialists;
- (5) paediatrics - 5 specialists;
- (6) ophthalmology - 3 specialists;
- (7) radiology - 3 specialists;
- (8) neurosurgery, psychiatry, urology and rehabilitation medicine - 1 specialist each; and
- (9) public health - 19 specialists.

These figures highlight critical shortages in areas such as neurosurgery, psychiatry, neurology and rehabilitation medicine which the Ministry is prioritising in its recruitment drive.

In conclusion Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry remains committed to equitable specialist distribution, and improved access to quality healthcare. With the assistance of the WHO Access to Quality Health Care, we are implementing strategic measures to build a responsive, well-balanced workforce within the formulation of the National Strategic Workforce Plan for Health 2025-2034.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a very serious issue in Fiji. We have seen many of our patients travelling to India and Australia, for their treatment. What we have seen, and thanks to the Chinese team that came and did a lot of surgeries in Fiji. This shows that we do have infrastructure to carry out surgeries in Fiji. This shows that we do have infrastructure to carry out these kind of surgeries in Fiji – even neurosurgery and all those things, we have the infrastructure. Are there any plans to recruit doctors from China and India on bilateral terms? Is there any talks to bring in these specialists, so that our patients do not have to fly out of Fiji, and those surgeries can be conducted within Fiji?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Yes, that is dependent on what service we plan to bring to Fiji to aid the patients who are awaiting further tertiary care treatment. For example, for ophthalmic surgeries, yes, we continue to receive visiting team such as the one from Guangdong Province, China, and other teams that come to various parts of Fiji. You can go to Natuvu, the Loloma Foundation, they do come in on a periodic timeframe in terms of ensuring that these kinds of surgeries are done in Fiji.

We must not also forget that the current assistance that the Government of India is giving, not only Fiji and region, but that will also add benefit to patients who usually go to India. They can have the speciality service done here in Fiji at the site that has been identified. That is something within the plan, but within the Ministry itself, we continue to engage with our development partners, with visiting teams. We have budget for visiting teams that come over to ensure that they come and do the services that is very much needed, and in the process look after the patients, especially in terms of reducing the backlog of cases that do require these specialist treatments.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, while giving your response, it just reminds me of our diaspora as well. Are they part of this specialist list? Do we have some arrangements in which we can use our diaspora, given their expertise and whatever, to come and help as well, and probably some incentives that we can give them?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- For the ones that I do know of, in terms of the diaspora that do come in and assist the Ministry, especially with specialist service, there are some who usually come on a basis whereby, they are loaned to us from their respective hospitals that they work in. That is an arrangement that is done between the Ministry and the respective organisation. Nevertheless, we have some very, very supportive specialist diaspora in Australia, New Zealand and USA, who are willing to come over and volunteer their time in terms of delivering health services that are currently not available in Fiji. For that, we as a Ministry are always trying to accommodate them in any way we can, as they are here to provide an essential service for which we agreed to.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please take note that Oral Question 340/2025 has been dropped from the Order Paper as the subject matter has been addressed through the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Finance on Thursday, 27th November, 2025.

(Oral Question No. 340/2025 dropped from Order Paper)

Body-Worn Camera Devices for LTA Officers
(Question No. 341/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the number of body cameras being introduced for LTA officers?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, strictly the answer is one number, but I will go through this. I thank the honourable Member for the questions regarding the usage, purpose and safety considerations of body-worn camera devices within the LTA.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I think you need to speak up. Some of the honourable Members cannot hear you.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Can you?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I can.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The intention behind the introduction of Body-Worn cameras (BWC) devices is to complement existing safety standards and operational procedures. These devices provide significant benefits to law enforcement officers by enhancing their health and safety, tackling situations that may pose perceived or actual risks. The BWC's are internationally recognised for promoting public reassurance, modifying behaviour, preventing harm, and deterring individuals from committing offences or engaging in antisocial behaviour.

In addition to frontline safety, the recordings captured by BWC's also support professional development through training and review. They further assist with investigations, especially in cases where allegations may be made against LTA officers, ensuring a transparent and evidence-based process.

Regarding activation, officers begin recording as soon as a roadside enforcement checkpoint is established. They are also required to activate the BWC when approaching high-risk areas or activities, and the device remains active until such activities are completed. Further, officers may activate the device at any time they feel threatened or unsafe, as guided by the BWC's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and applicable laws.

At present, the Authority is piloting five Body-Worn Camera units with the Central and Eastern Enforcement Teams. There are plans to expand this pilot by trialling the same units with Enforcement Teams in the Western and Northern Divisions. This structured pilot approach allows the Authority to assess operational viability before wider deployment.

On safety matters, the primary concern relates to privacy and data protection. To address these issues, the LTA has engaged suppliers who have provided robust and practical data security solutions. These includes strict access controls, secure encrypted storage of footage, and clearly defined retention timelines to ensure automatic deletion of recordings when they are no longer required. The ongoing pilot is crucial in validating the effectiveness of these protections before full-scale implementation. The initiative demonstrates the Government's commitment to strengthening enforcement integrity, safeguarding officers, and enhancing public trust in transport regulations.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, if I heard you correctly, you said the activation and deactivation of these vests is with the officer. If that is correct, does that not defeat the purpose? Should it not be activated once they leave the LTA, and deactivated when they come back to ensure the recordings are correctly done?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, to tell you the truth, they have not demonstrated it to me personally, but that is what they have informed me in terms of the activation. I do not think, from the explanation, there is no centralised sort of control system where someone is monitoring them. It is a sort of standalone unit at the moment as it is being piloted. That is something which I will need to verify in terms of the answer to your question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this has come at a right time, and I thank the Government for implementing these body cameras for the enforcement officers, because with the doubling of speeding fines, the chances of bribery are much higher. Is there a time frame by when every enforcement officer, whether you are passing a vehicle, stopping a car, or stopping a truck would be equipped with this body camera? As I have understood from your explanation, it is not centralised as of yet, but they can be tampered with as well. Is there a timeframe by when LTA would be enforcing this to every officer, including the Police force as well eventually in time to come?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned, it is on a pilot at the moment. So, the timeframe for that, we will need to get further information on that, most probably about six months, and then see how it goes from there. The other issue is, we need to tighten up on the regulatory and legislative framework around it. There are also concerns regarding, for example, the privacy of data, et cetera. Also, the implications for both sides - operator and the public.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I congratulate LTA for going into this particular step. I think once it is fully operational, it will have a lot of benefits. Currently the system, is it a recording system or does it send the images by WIFI or by data to some place where it is deposited centrally?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I need to verify that.

E-Plan Lodgement System
(Question No. 342/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the recent e-plan lodgement system and how it would contribute to Fiji's infrastructure and land development?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to provide the House with the answer to that question. Before I do so, perhaps, I join you in welcoming, and also congratulating my young *tauvus* from Navatu in Ra for joining us this afternoon. I was mistaken, Madam Deputy Speaker, because when I came in and I heard that they were from Navatu, I immediately greeted them in my dialect, and then I saw confused faces and then I realised it is probably Navatu from Ra.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ra Province is the most unique province in Fiji. The reason why I say that is, whether it is morning, noon time, or even at midnight, you get greeted with *ara na yadra* all the time. So, thank you for joining us in Parliament today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I go to the question, again, my colleague on this side of the House, the honourable Leader of Government in Parliament, where he had to answer some very serious questions from the other side about body cameras. My take on that is, we can sit comfortably in the House of Parliament, they had 16 years to do body cameras and facilitate that which they are concerned about – they concerned about bribery, they are concerned about safety. All of these concerns - they had absolute discretion for 16 years to do that, and they did nothing.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Koya, your Point of Order is which?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Standing Order 60(1) on Relevance, I must repeat what the Honourable Leader of the Government says. His question is related to something else completely, and I think he has

gone off another tangent, and maybe he has taken up the mantle from the honourable Biman Prasad, but he is being irrelevant.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Fair enough. Continue honourable Vosarogo.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I accept that in concession and concede to that point made by my learned friend. There is no need to malign honourable Professor Prasad in his reference.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the e-lodgement system represents Government's initiative of modernising Fiji's land administration, and it seeks to move survey plan lodgement to an online platform. Thus, the Ministry is seeking to position itself to deliver a more efficient, more transparent service by providing all of the stakeholders with improved access to survey and cadastral data.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on 7th November, 2025, the Ministry launched Phase Two of the e-plan lodgement system, marking a significant milestone in the Ministry's ongoing digital transformation agenda. This phase extends the platform's access to external surveyors from private firms and other Government agencies, allowing them to lodge survey plans directly through online portals.

Hence, Phase One, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the e-plan lodgement system successfully introduced an internal online platform for Ministry surveyors to lodge and assess plans digitally using specialised survey software, as this provided insights that improved the workflow within the Ministry and set the foundation for wider adaptation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative demonstrates this Coalition Government's continued commitment to modernising land administration and enhancing efficiency, transparency and accountability within the Ministry. The Ministry has prioritised transitioning from manual paper-based systems to an integrated digital platform that delivers a more faster and more reliable service since land survey and registration services are essentially for ensuring accurate mapping, secure tenure and sound land management across Fiji. The e-plan lodgement system directly addresses one of the sector's long-standing challenges, and I am sure that we will all agree, it is the delay in plan assessments.

Additionally, Madam Deputy Speaker, the approval process for survey plans could take up to 90 days, and that is really on the conservative. Sometimes, it goes for months, and sometimes, unfortunately, it will sit for years. However, with this new system, the Ministry is aiming to reduce this by 45 percent, so, the target really, out of this online platform improvement, is to have a 30-day turnaround.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not just improvement in process, it is a transformation in how we deliver service to the people of Fiji. Faster processing means better service delivery, improved investor confidence, and greater satisfaction for stakeholder and the public. However, the integration strengthens the Ministry's digital infrastructure and supports improved coordination between land information systems and other Government databases to ensure data consistency, security and accuracy across all of the platforms.

The vision for this e-lodgement system is vividly clear by connecting all surveyors in Fiji to the e-plan platform and standardise the use of common survey software across the profession, as this will enhance collaboration between the public and the private sector and promote consistent data standards nationwide. The Ministry is committed to modernising our land administration, and plan survey lodgement processes in line with its mandate to administer, develop and manage State

land initiatives.

Before I take my seat, Madam Deputy Speaker, this e-platform initiative or online platform was wholly developed by IT experts within my own Geospatial Information Management (GIM) Division, and I want to acknowledge them here. These are hardworking young IT specialists who I challenged them a year ago that we do not need to get consultants to come and do what we know should be done. They know it, and they have the skillset to get it done. To the manager, Meizyanne Hicks, the supervisor - Rocky Gucake, and the team made up of Jennie Bentley, Shivnish Singh, and Onesmus Pasikali - thank you very much for all the hard work that you put into this, and you are part of history in the making for our country.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please take note that Oral Question 343/2025 has been dropped from the Order Paper as the subject matter was addressed by the honourable Minister for Public Works, Services and Transport on Thursday, 27th November, 2025 during Question Time.

(Oral Question No. 343/2025 dropped from Order Paper)

Honourable Members also take note that Oral Question 344/2025 has been withdrawn by honourable Alipate Tuicolo, and that means honourable Members that Question time is now over.

(Oral Question No. 344/2025 withdrawn by honourable A.N. Tuicolo)

REGISTRATION OF SKILLED PROFESSIONALS (REPEAL) BILL 2025

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Registration of Skilled Professionals Repeal Bill 2025 (Bill No. 44/2025), 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 Thursday, 4th December, 2025, but that one hour be given for the debate with the right of reply given to me as the Minister moving this motion.

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

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, may I also add my words of welcome to the students of Navatu in Ra. I would encourage them to ask their fathers and grandfathers and parents to take them to Navatu in Cakaudrove where your relatives now reside, after passing through the interior of Viti Levu, through to the coast of Qoma and Nabulebulewa around to Verata, before we went through the islands of Lomaiviti to be in Vanua Levu where we now reside.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Registration of Skilled Professionals Act 2016 was enacted with the intention of addressing shortage of specialised skills in Fiji by establishing a dedicated mechanism to attract and register foreign skilled professionals. Its goal was to provide an additional pathway to fill immediate gaps in sectors critical to Fiji's development.

To operationalise that objective, the Act established a Skilled Professionals Evaluation

Committee, mandated to assess Fiji's need for skilled professionals, evaluate applications for special registration and issue directives to facilitate the employment of foreign professionals. In so doing, the Committee was also tasked with positioning Fiji as a competitive destination for skilled professionals.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, in practice, the Act has inadvertently established a parallel pathway that by-passes well-established registration, licensing and vetting systems long administered by statutory professional bodies and by the Ministry of Immigration. This duplication has created uncertainty, blurred institutional mandates, and, in some instances, avoided essential checks that exist to uphold public safety, national interests and professional integrity.

Our professional bodies and the Ministry of Immigration possess the statutory authority, technical expertise and institutional experience that are necessary to assess qualifications, competency, fitness to practice and suitability for entry to work in Fiji. Their roles are integral to maintaining standards of service, protecting communities and safeguarding our borders. These roles should not be weakened, compromised or overlooked.

When decisions about skilled professionals are made outside of these established frameworks, Fiji is exposed to considerable risk, including the potential for negligence, substantive professional practices and regulatory gaps that compromise public health, safety and welfare.

Skilled professionals such as those in healthcare, engineering and other specialised technical fields operate under strict regulatory standards designed to ensure competence and accountability. These standards should not be bypassed or weakened in the interest of expediency and, likewise, fast-tracking entry. Work or residency permits outside of normal immigration processes create vulnerability that affects our national security and Fiji's integrity as a destination for tourism and investment. By implication, the Act created a second gate at the border that weakened the processes I have just indicated, thus compounding the risks to Fiji.

For these reasons, Madam Deputy Speaker, and in the interest of strengthening and upholding our regulatory systems, protecting public safety and reinforcing the mandates of our professional and immigration authorities, I commend this Bill to Parliament.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the honourable Prime Minister. Members may speak for up to 20 minutes, and I now ask if anyone would like to participate in the debate.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as I always say, I do not have an issue with the use of Standing Order 51, but in this instance, I would request the honourable Prime Minister if this can be sent to the Committee. I would like to declare my interest and I will explain why I am requesting this.

In Fiji, as a business owner and a pharmacy owner, we have a critical shortage of pharmacists in Fiji. We have a registration process, but our registration process basically follows the Australian and New Zealand standards. In our Pharmacy Profession Act 2011, if we look at the Act itself, only people who can come and work as a pharmacist in Fiji and who are pre-qualified to work as a registered pharmacist in Fiji, if they are from Australia, New Zealand, US, Great Britain, or South Africa. Now, we very well know, in Fiji, we pay just around \$50,000 to a pharmacist, but pharmacists in these countries overseas are earning close to \$100,000 to \$150,000 in their own currency.

Why would these people opt to come and fill the skills shortage gap that is created by our graduates moving out of the country? In order for us to fill this gap, we need to bring in professionals from countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, India, but unfortunately, the Pharmacy Profession Act does not recognise pharmacists from these areas. There is a high shortage. Recently, there was a registration exam in which I was told that 30 students sat for the exam, but only 3 passed. Most of the pharmacies in Fiji, the owners themselves are working as pharmacists because we do not have enough pharmacists in Fiji.

Likewise, there was an issue when this particular Bill was brought about, and I did debate on this. There are a lot of professionals who try to come and set up medical camps in Fiji. They have to go through the whole registration process, even though they come on a voluntary basis, trying to assist our health system. Because as the question was, we do not have a number of qualified specialists to cater for the demand and the need that exists within Fiji.

Having removed this, if someone goes to the Fiji Medical Council to try to get an approval or get a licence, it might take ages to get it done. For example, if we try to bring in someone from the Philippines to work as a pharmacist in Fiji, they need to come and do a two-year internship and then sit for the exam. How can we fill in the skill gap if they have to come and sit for this registration exam to practise in Fiji?

Honourable Prime Minister, I urge you, if this can be sent to the Committee for relevant consultation with the stakeholders, and we can debate this. I am not saying not to repeal it, but let us send it to the Committee at least for a month, and by the time we come back in February, we will have a clear picture as to what other sectors are saying in terms of the skilled professionals in Fiji. As a pharmacy owner, I was not consulted on this, and I do not think even the Fiji Pharmaceutical Society was consulted, because we are one of the major stakeholders and part of this as well.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill and it is under Standing Order 51. When I took office as the Minister, one of the first things that was brought to my attention was the workers who were brought through this process, such as in the pharmacy industry, that they did not go through the proper processes as our local pharmacists do. That is why honourable Maharaj may have raised his interest with regard to the Bill, but from the pharmacists that I have contacted, they are fully supportive of the repeal of this Bill so that whoever wants to come and work here they can be channelled to one registration process and that applies to everyone.

There is something that we are currently trying to improve as we speak, and that can be brought forward in its entirety on the tactic that governs the workforce itself. Nevertheless, like I mentioned, it is one of the first few things that was brought to my attention in terms of fairness for pharmacists who have gone through the process of registration locally, and there was a different rule that applied for those who came under this process.

With that being said, Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister's visit to India we had also approached the Government of India in terms of workforce assistance, especially in certain areas within the Ministry of Health, and one in particular is pharmacy. That is something that is in discussion phase of the process, and we look forward to working with the Ministry of Employment in this.

What I want to say in support of the Bill, passing through Standing Order 51, I support it as it is, and simply the fact, for registration purposes, it is done for a reason, for safety standards, and if your standard is applied to us here at home, then it should be applied universally to everyone who wants to come and work in Fiji, especially in a pharmacy setting.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not asking a supplementary question. In contributing to the debate, I think there is merit to move this on Standing Order 51. What we are doing is, closing one door and just have one door for people to come through to Fiji. Before this, there was only one. It was the Immigration Act. Having this on the side, from a security perspective, I do not think is a good idea. This came in 2016. Before that, everything and everyone that came to Fiji, came through the door provided by the Immigration Act 2003.

I firmly believe there is merit to move this under Standing Order 51 and close the door as they are easier to control. As I said, before this, all the professionals that came to Fiji came through via the Immigration Act and we worked with professional bodies to help us decide as to whether these are professionals or not. I support the motion to move this under Standing Order 51.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, we have no problems with Standing Order 51, but we are suggesting as a compromise to bring it again in the first sitting next year. The fact is, there is definitely skills shortage, and we do not want to compromise the standards, but it is good that we refer it to the Committee, and bring it back early next year, so that we can have a balanced view of all the submissions made to the Committee. I know that not only for this particular profession, but we have these archaic laws.

The Ministry of Agriculture faces the same. We cannot get veterinaries from other countries simply because of this. Previously, most of our systems were structured around Australia, New Zealand, and the Commonwealth. When it comes to Quarantine regulations, we cannot. Most of the private sector used to argue - we have just come back from Brazil —Brazil is one of the largest food-producing countries. Our trading partners are importing from Brazil to their systems, because their systems allow it, and then they re-export to Fiji. We cannot go directly to these countries. These are the archaic laws that we have, and this is a typical example. I would kindly suggest to the Government, we have no problems with Standing Order 51, but just move it to the February sitting, and then we can come and debate this because of the many reasons I have outlined, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the real purpose why we want to repeal this Bill and use Standing Order 51 is because if we repeal this, there is no gap. They are saying there is a gap. No, there is no gap. What used to exist was a Work Permit Committee that comprised all relevant agencies. For example, for agriculture, there will be one from agriculture to sit-in. What happened was, with the previous government, they took it out. There is no committee that scrutinises the application. The problem with this law, first, it is very brief one.

In clause 5, the Committee has the necessary powers to enable it to perform these functions - to issue directive. That means to the authority that is granted. Only Immigration around the world is given that authority. Why that authority is subject to another Committee makes no sense. That is the reason, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you repeal it, there is no gap. All we have to do is, Immigration reorganise itself, reaffirm the Work Permit Committee with all the related agencies, and they can fast-track the process. I support the motion before the House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, just to clarify something. I think what needs to be said is that the people that sat on this Committee, honourable Prime Minister, were five Permanent Secretaries. It was not a willy-nilly Committee that just approved everything. The reason why that was given has been spelt out earlier. We are not asking anything, I think there was a major reason why this was done, it was not really affecting immigration that much, it was a case of just making sure that it was processed quick enough because we had some very archaic methodology with respect to qualifications, et cetera. It needed to be done because there was a gap. So, we had five permanent secretaries. One month, Sir, is all we are asking for so that we can get the other sectors of the

community to see what they need.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank all the honourable Members who have raised their issues in relation to this motion before the House. I would like to assure them that repealing the Bill will take us back to where we have professional input into the selection. There is no reason to fear that, that one cannot be amended as we go along. It does not need to come back as part of an Act or a Bill to repeal an Act. So, I commend the Bill before the House.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | - | 29 |
| Noes | - | 10 |
| Not Voted | - | 16 |

Motion agreed to.

PUBLIC HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Public Health (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 43 of 2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to the Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 4th December, 2025 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the member moving the motion.

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

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Office of the Solicitor-General conducted a comprehensive review of the Public Health Act 1935, which Cabinet had endorsed in its decision No. 53 of 2025. The review identified the need to update extremely low penalties, replace outdated roles and strengthen outbreak response powers.

The review of the Act included provisions necessary to facilitate the Building Permits Approval System (BPAS), wherein the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development is developing BPAS as part of the Project NOWFiji.

The current Act governs many aspects of buildings, building approvals, sanitation and health standards that require local authority approval, positioning it as one of the key approval agencies in the building permit process. While the complete Public Health (Amendment) Bill 2025 was prepared and ready for tabling in this Parliament, through Cabinet Decision 418 of 2025, a strategic shift dictates that immediate needs to extract the BPAS component from the larger Bill.

The objective is to table a focused Public Health (Amendment) Bill that deals exclusively with necessary legislative changes required BPAS to be implemented without further delay. As such, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, through the Bill, repeals the Public Health Act 1935, Part 3 of Building Section (19), notice to be given and plan furnished to complement Section 7 of the Town Planning Act 1946. This action is critical to unlock the path for the Government's digital business reform initiatives, while allowing the more substantive long-term public health reforms to proceed as a separate and comprehensive legislative package later.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the honourable Minister. Members may speak for up to 20 minutes, if you wish to participate in this debate.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for this amendment Bill. We do not have any issues because we understand that it is a one-line facilitator really for the BPAS system, so we have no objections with it.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Are there any other interest on debating this Bill, honourable Members? I see there is none.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- No further comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the support of all the honourable Members.

DEPUTY SPEAKER. - Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MAHOGANY BILL 2025

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. - Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order (51), I move:

That the -

- (a) Mahogany Bill 2025 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at a sitting of Parliament next year;
- (e) Upon presentation of the report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving the motion.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen. I rise to table before this honourable House the Mahogany Bill 2025, for its First Reading. This Bill marks the most significant overhaul of Fiji's mahogany legislative framework in more than a decade, and it reflects the collective insights and aspirations of landowners, industry operators, statutory bodies and government stakeholders.

The mahogany industry remains one of Fiji's most valuable natural resource sectors, contributing to rural livelihoods, export earnings and sustainable economic growth. However, the current legislative framework no longer adequately supports the modern needs of the industry. Today, I present a Bill that provides the foundation for a fairer, more efficient, and more sustainable mahogany sector, one that honours the interests of resource owners while unlocking broader economic opportunities for Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the development of the mahogany legislation began with the Fiji Mahogany Act 2003, which established the Fiji Mahogany Trust, and provided the early commercial oversight of the industry. This was followed by the Mahogany Industry Development Act 2010 or MIDA which created the Mahogany Industry Council and outlined the roles of the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited and Fiji Mahogany Trust.

In 2011, Parliament introduced the Mahogany Industry Licensing and Branding Act 2011 which governs mahogany licensing and branding to this day. Over time these laws had become restrictive and outdated. Landowners and operators consistently raised concerns about limited landowner representation in decision making, rigid and narrow licensing structures, difficulties in adjusting log prices, confusion over the distribution of landowner proceeds, restrictions affecting the mandate of Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited, which often overlaps with the authority of the Land Trust Board. These issues, Madam Deputy Speaker, collectively demonstrated that a comprehensive reform was urgently needed to bring clarity, justice and sustainability to the sector.

In October of 2024, Cabinet supported this reform by establishing the Cabinet Sub-committee on Mahogany Legislation, which led a full review of the legislation between 2024 and 2025. The Ministry of Forestry worked in close collaboration with the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited, Fiji Mahogany Trust, iTaukei Land Trust Board and the Office of the Solicitor-General. A legal consultant, Mr. Atunaisa Siwatibau of Siwatibau and Sloan Lawyers was engaged to undertake the detailed review and facilitate public consultations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the review was comprehensive and inclusive. It began with one on one consultations with government ministries, statutory bodies and industry experts, ensuring that the first draft of the Bill was grounded in practical realities. This was followed by nationwide divisional consultations in April 2025, where landowners, licensees, operators, and community representatives provided critical feedback on landowner benefits, governance, licensing requirements and the overall policy direction of the industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a second round of consultations was held in November 2025 to review outdated provisions. Further internal reviews led to the refined version of the Bill that is now before Parliament for its first reading. This process demonstrated strong consensus across the country, emphasising the need that the mahogany industry requires a modern framework that strengthens landowner benefits, enhances transparency, and restores confidence across the sector.

The Mahogany Bill 2025 is built on two pillars: to provide equitable and sustainable growth, and the development of the mahogany industry. Madam Deputy Speaker, landowners are central to the Bill's design. The Bill strengthens the Mahogany Trust by returning 20 percent of Fiji Hardwood Corporation's shareholding to landowners, and ensures that governance within the Trust is transparent, accountable and merit based.

It also establishes a new Land Owner Equitable Benefit Fund, which creates a structured, predictable and transparent mechanism for distributing proceeds from mahogany sales. This Fund guarantees that landowning units can directly and fairly benefit from the commercial value of their plantations. Additionally, the Bill encourages greater landowner participation in the commercial

aspects of the mahogany supply chain, from harvesting to downstream processing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill proposes for the removal of the Mahogany Industry Council, which had been viewed as duplicative and restrictive. It restores regulatory responsibilities to the long-standing institutions like the Ministry of Forestry, the Fiji Mahogany Trust, iLTB, and relevant statutory agencies where they naturally belong.

To foster ongoing dialogue and transparency, the Bill establishes a Mahogany Forum, which serves as a structured platform for landowners, operators and Government to address concerns collaboratively. It also introduces a Mahogany Tribunal - providing a fair, accessible and independent avenue, for resolving disputes and addressing long-standing grievances, that were not effectively dealt with, under the current laws.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill supports long-term sustainability, by restoring mahogany plantation lands to the regulatory scope of the Forest Act, ensuring appropriate environmental oversight. It removes the restrictive licencing model under The Mahogany Industry (Licensing and Branding) Act 2011 (MILBA) framework, helping to create a more open and competitive market environment. In doing so, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill simplifies regulatory processes, encourages private sector participation and strengthens investor confidence. These reforms jointly promote sustainable harvesting, support environmental stewardship and enhance the economic value of Fiji's mahogany resources.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the most transformative aspects of the Mahogany Bill 2025, is the reform that allows Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) to expand its operations beyond the narrow function of selling unprocessed logs. Under the current legislative framework, FHCL's role has been confined largely to log production and sale, which has restricted its commercial potential and limited Fiji's ability to capture high value from its own mahogany supply chain.

The new Bill corrects this limitation by empowering FHCL to participate in processing, value addition, and broader commercial development of mahogany. These includes activities such as sawn timber production, high-value product manufacturing, and deeper engagement in domestic and export markets. Unlike the current legislative framework, which is fragmented and restrictive, the Mahogany Bill 2025 presents a simpler, fairer and more coherent approach. It eliminates rigid licencing systems, enhances landowner representation, clarifies benefit sharing mechanisms, strengthens dispute resolutions, restores environmental oversight, and encourages open market competition.

The Bill marks a clear departure from the out-dated and restrictive provisions of the 2010 and 2011 Acts, and replaces them with a system that is transparent, equitable, and aligned with modern forestry governance standards. Madam Deputy Speaker, the reforms contained in this Bill deliver significant national benefits. Landowners will enjoy greater influence over decisions affecting their plantations and will benefit from more transparent and predictable revenue-sharing arrangements through the new Fund. They will also be better supported to participate directly in commercial operations, improving livelihoods and community development.

For the industry, the Bill removes unnecessary barriers, giving operators a predictable and modern regulatory environment that encourages innovation, efficiency and investment confidence. For Government, the Bill ensures better alignment across institutions, strengthens environmental oversight, and contributes to sustainable economic growth and rural development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Mahogany Bill 2025 is the product of robust legal analysis, extensive public consultation, and strong interagency collaboration. It reflects the aspirations of

landowners, the needs of industry and the responsibility of Government to establish a fair, sustainable and future-focused legislative framework.

I therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, respectfully commend the Mahogany Bill 2025 to the honourable House, and seek the support of honourable Members for its passage during the First Reading, and request that the Bill be referred to the relevant Standing Committee for detailed examination and public submission before returning to Parliament for its Second Reading.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I congratulate the honourable Minister for bringing the Bill to Parliament. It has been one that a lot of people have been waiting for, and we look forward to looking at the Bill in Committee, and we support the passage of this Bill.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I again thank my colleagues on the other side of the House for their support of the Bill, and I look forward to the debate and the passing of this Bill in the next sitting of next year.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[The Mahogany Bill 2025 referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and the Committee to report on the Bill at a sitting of Parliament next year]

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.21 p.m.