

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 28TH NOVEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 28TH NOVEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.41 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources; honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry; honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry; honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change; honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister; honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs; honourable Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports; honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; honourable P.D. Kumar; honourable P.K. Bala; and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 27th November, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome all those joining us in the public gallery, and those watching the live broadcast. Thank you for staying connected and engaged in the workings of Parliament.

Visitors in the Public Gallery

I recognise in the gallery, firstly, the presence of Reverend Inia Mavai, *Talatala ni Tabacakacaka o Vuna* including Adi Cakobau School (ACS) and *Wasewase o Rewa* of the Methodist Church of Fiji. You are welcome to Parliament on behalf of the honourable Members. *Talatala, ni bula vinaka.*

Honourable Members, please join me in welcoming the students, teachers and parents of Viria Public School in Naitasiri. You are most welcome to your Parliament. I hope that this visit will provide valuable insights into the workings of Parliament and deepen your understanding of its role in being one of the three arms of State.

Kabara District School

Honourable Members, for those interested, Kabara District School that visited us on Tuesday is participating for the first time at the Tuckers Primary School Athletics meet at the HFC Stadium, which concludes today. Yesterday, the school won its first medal ever, and a gold medal at that. So, you can imagine the euphoria amongst our people here and on the island with that news. I can only say that for us, it rivals the national fervour when our country, Fiji, won its first ever gold medal in Sevens Rugby in the Rio Olympics.

Kabara District School is sailing back to the island in the *MV Yavirau* on Monday, riding high on their experience here. Thank you for hosting them, and their *matasarasara* that has occupied them for one week, but also with the boat laden with their gold medal.

Launching of New Banknotes

For the information of honourable Members, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) will be launching a new series of banknotes, which will be officially unveiled by His Excellency the President, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu on Tuesday, 2nd December, 2025 at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

To commemorate this national milestone, RBF has extended invitations to all the honourable Members of Parliament. Therefore, I remind all honourable Members to confirm your RSVP with the Bank today so that they may prepare accordingly for next week's event.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Point of Order by Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau

I now move on to rule on a Point of Order that was made by honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau yesterday. As I had alluded to you yesterday, I would peruse the extract of the uncorrected *Daily Hansard* and, thereafter, deliver my ruling on the Point of Order.

I have now had the opportunity to go through the extract of the uncorrected *Daily Hansard* of yesterday's proceedings and will now deliver my ruling accordingly.

The honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament rose on a Point of Order, under Standing Order 62(1), concerning the remarks made during Question time by honourable Alvick Maharaj specifically, and the words used were, and I quote; "biggest education scam in this country, which is the Pacific Polytech."

Honourable Tuisawau further stated that Pacific Polytech was not a fraudulent setup and that it was already approved, legislated and budgeted for. This prompted my Office to peruse the Budget Estimates that was presented in July 2025 and can verily confirm that Pacific Polytech was allocated a budget for its operations.

I have further perused Standing Order 62(1), and it clearly provides that, and I quote, "a member must not impute improper motives to any other member." My reading of honourable Maharaj's remarks was that he was referring to the institution and not to any Member. It is in that respect that I find the point of order raised by the honourable Leader of the Government irrelevant and, therefore, out of order.

However, in recognition of the legitimacy of the institution, Pacific Polytech, with budgetary allocation in the national budget subsequently approved by Parliament, I am compelled to address

the remarks by honourable Maharaj. Having perused the extract of yesterday's uncorrected *Daily Hansard*, I find that the remark made by the honourable Member describing Pacific Polytech as the biggest education scam in this is out of order.

Pacific Polytech is a duly recognised institution, established and operating legitimately under the budgetary allocation approved by the National Budget. It is, therefore, inappropriate in my view, to characterise it in such terms within this House and accordingly rule that those remarks and the statement are out of order. In that respect, I hereby direct the honourable Alvick Maharaj, to withdraw those remarks and statements, and that the extract be expunged from the *Hansard Report*.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with all due respect to your office, I withdraw the statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following reports were tabled by the Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation, in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

Reserve Bank of Fiji – Annual Report August 2024–July 2025 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 7 of 2025*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

Fiji National Provident Fund - Annual Report 2025 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 82 of 2025*)

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

Ministry of Agriculture - Annual Report 2022-2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 99 of 2025*)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that the Reserve Bank of Fiji Quarterly Economic Review – September 2025 is for information only and will not be referred to any Standing Committee.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Measures to Protect Migrant Workers
(Question No. 304/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations update Parliament on measures the Ministry has implemented to protect migrant workers from wage theft, unfair contracts and poor working conditions?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Qereqeretabua for the question. The Coalition Government through my Ministry is firmly committed to ensuring that all workers, including our migrant workforce are protected by our laws and treated with dignity and fairness. Our approach is comprehensive, focussing on robust frameworks, effective enforcement and continuous

policy improvement to safeguard against such issues as wage theft, unfair contracts and poor working conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the measures we have implemented and enforced are multifaceted as follows. A universal legal framework, the cornerstone of our protection is that all employment legislations, including the Employment Relations Act 2007 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1996 apply equally to both, foreign and local workers. This ensures that migrant workers have the same legal protection regarding their contracts, working conditions, and safety as any Fijian worker.

Pro-active Enforcement and Dispute Resolution: My Ministry maintains an active enforcement mechanism to address complaints from any worker, including migrant workers. Since 2021, the Ministry has received over 270 labour complaints from migrant workers. A vast majority of these cases have been successfully resolved, demonstrating our commitment to timely and effective justice. Furthermore, we have a proven track record of recovering unpaid wages for these migrant workers; having recovered a total of \$118,426.40. Mr Speaker, Sir, as I alluded to yesterday, local recoveries in the last five years have been more than \$6 million, which means more than a million dollars a year. Short-changing workers is a matter that warrants zero tolerance.

Targeted Policy Development and Review: Recognising the need for continuous improvement, the Ministry is undertaking significant policy reviews. We are currently reviewing the Employment Relations Act 2007 to explicitly include and strengthen protections for foreign and migrant workers, with a particular focus on seafarers. Labour inspectors will be able to enter workplaces while in operation. We have noted that breaches in OHS mostly occur during night shifts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a concurrent review of the Immigration Act 2003 by the Ministry of Immigration is also underway to strengthen the work permit process, ensuring it supports fair recruitment and fair employment. In collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and other partners, the Government is developing Fiji's National Labour Mobility Policy and Strategy, which will provide a comprehensive, forward-looking framework for the protection and welfare of migrant workers.

This month, the Ministry of Immigration convened a series of high-level meetings on national migration and governance. These meetings began with a workshop on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, continued with a technical working group to validate Fiji's new migration policy and action plan. The meetings were not just discussions, they were critical steps to turn policy intentions into enforceable national strategy. The review of the Employment Relations Act 2007 and the development of the National Labour Mobility Policy and Strategy are not happening in a vacuum. The meetings were concrete actions that precede enforcement. Protecting migrant workers requires coordination across ministries, immigration, police, et cetera.

The Inter-Agency Steering Committee meeting was specifically designed to ensure a high-level buy-in and coordination, ensuring that once the new policies are approved, every relevant agency is aligned to their role in enforcement. By aligning Fiji's approach with Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, the Government is integrating international best practices into its national framework. This directly addresses the core of the question, preventing wage theft, unfair contracts, and poor conditions by building a more robust and preventive system from the ground upwards.

In short, these meetings demonstrate that the Government is moving beyond reacting to individual complaints, and is instead, building a cohesive, systemic, and preventive national strategy to protect migrant workers, which will then be rigorously enforced across all Government agencies. The Coalition Government's commitment to protecting migrant workers is absolute and not

negotiable. We have moved beyond mere rhetoric and are taking decisive and concrete actions. We are not only enforcing the law to recover stolen wages and resolve disputes but are also systematically building an ironclad system, designed to prevent exploitation from occurring in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government will not tolerate the exploitation of any worker on Fijian soil. We are sending an unequivocal message to all employers - comply with our laws and uphold the dignity of every worker or face the full coordinated force of the law. Our measures are being implemented, our enforcement is active, and our resolve is steadfast. I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, as you mentioned with the ever-changing landscape with respect to migrant workers and our own workers, not just necessarily migrant workers, is the Ministry looking at bringing in some legislation similar to what they have in the United Kingdom, like the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977? Would you be akin to, or thinking about bringing in some legislation with respect to such things?

I know there are protections afforded within our laws, but it would be something that would take us to the next level and the next step in terms of contractual situations.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, the proposed labour law reform that is now ongoing, once it becomes law, all these will be included.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his reply, and I think it is important that we treat all workers equally. One of the things that I have noticed in some of the articles I read in the papers is that for migrant workers who are here, they signed certain conditions that in their own country but when they come here, it is different - they experience a different thing. They are obviously signing up to the agent in their country with different sets of conditions and when they come here, it is different. What is the Ministry trying to do to deal with that, to make sure that whatever they sign there is what they get here, or vice versa?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Usamate for the question. The agents that sign up the contracts with the workers out there in countries of origin, when they arrive here, it is our responsibility and whenever it is brought to our attention, we ensure that if their contracts need to be varied, they are varied in a manner that is in compliance with our national laws and meet the minimum standards.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, the issue of preference for change of employers; I have come across a few where the working conditions are not favourable. Is this an immigration issue or is this with you? There are instances where, unfortunately, the passports are held by the first employer.

I came across one case where a worker who was working in a construction company that was renovating my home during COVID time, was picked up on the street and he could not return to Bangladesh because his passport was with someone else. Is this more of a labour issue and employment relations, or more with immigration? What can we do about that?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. Yes, it is actually an immigration matter, but we all know that withholding anyone's passport is illegal. If that is reported, they can be prosecuted. There is no two ways about that.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Minister is on the compensation. Are foreign workers covered under the workers compensation, like the local workers?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our national laws apply equally to all workers.

Cost of Living Index for Rural and Urban Dwellers
(Question No. 306/2025)

HON. I. S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament whether there was any study undertaken to evaluate the Cost-of-Living Index for rural and urban dwellers?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. No separate or standalone study has been undertaken specifically to measure the cost of living index for our rural and urban communities. However, the Government relies on one of the strongest and most comprehensive tools available to us and, that is, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), which provides the depth of information needed to understand how our families are coping with the cost of living.

The HIES, conducted every five years by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBOS), goes far beyond simple price checks. It plays a critical role in collecting household information on income, expenditure, access to essential services such as housing, transport, communication, education and health. The survey captures how households actually live, what they earn, how they spend, and the challenges they face in meeting their daily needs.

In addition, the HIES provides updated and essential national statistics, including updated poverty lines and poverty estimates, multidimensional indicators of hardship and the revised Consumer Price Index (CPI) that makes our inflation measure accurate and relevant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the evidence that help us see which families are under the most pressure and where support is needed, whether in food, transport, housing or in basic services. It is through this understanding that Government has been able to introduce targeted interventions such as zero-rating essential food items; and this includes some critical goods and strengthening social protection for the vulnerable groups. These are practical measures that have helped ease pressures on the household budgets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the HIES is conducted every five years, our monitoring does not stop there. We track living costs continuously through monthly CPI updates and regular market price inspections by Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), wages and employment data, and insights from social support groups or programmes, such as the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS). Together, these help us maintain a clear and up-to-date picture of the pressure facing our people.

I would also highlight that the CPI has now been successfully rebased to 2019, using the most recent 2019 HIES data. This means, our inflation numbers, which guide cost of living decisions, now reflect the current reality of household spending patterns across Fiji. Inflation in the last nine months has been in the negative territory and stood at -3.4 percent in October 2025.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2025-2026 National Budget, we have provided around \$4.1 million to the FBOS for the 2025-2026 HIES, which will provide us with the most recent data on household income and expenditures, and which will further strengthen our understanding and guide future policy decisions. Our goal is simple, it is to ensure that every decision we make is grounded in solid evidence and aimed at improving the daily lives of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government remains committed to easing the cost-of-living pressures, protecting vulnerable families and building an economy where every household, rural or urban, has the opportunity to live with dignity and security.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- , Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister; is there any plan to have a dedicated Cost-of-Living Index for Fiji, and what would this involve? What are the future outcomes?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had already mentioned, we do not have a standalone Cost-of-Living Index, however, the Government has already set out a clear direction to strengthen how the cost-of-living is measured in Fiji. As the country's official statistical authority, the FBOS is responsible for undertaking regular national surveys and compiling data that inform some policy decisions. So, they have been around for some time now.

At the moment, as I have mentioned, FBOS is compiling the Consumer Price Index, which is a national measure that is used to track changes in the prices of a fixed basket of goods and services, commonly purchased by households. The composition of this basket of goods and services is based on information collected through the HIES.

On the other hand, a Cost-of-Living Index would typically measure how much income a household needs to maintain a constant standard of living, accounting for changes in consumption patterns, substitution, quality changes and new products. In this regard, a credible Cost-of-Living Index can only be built on accurate and up-to-date household information. That is why the Government has taken decisive action by funding the 2025-2026 HIES. This major survey, covering households across the Divisions, as I had mentioned before, will provide the most comprehensive picture of how our people live, earn and spend.

The Cost-of-Living Index would involve updated household expenditure weights from the new HIES, expanded coverage across both rural and urban communities, detailed price-tracking for essential needs such as food, housing, transport, utilities, communication, education and healthcare, and also a more frequent updated cycle to reflect real-time pressures on families. As mentioned before, we are sticking with the current measures that we have, and we will not move too fast towards a dedicated Cost-of-Living Index.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister, you mentioned about the 2025-2026 HIES survey, has this started? If so, when do we expect this to be completed and, most importantly, when can we get the official findings of the survey report?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned, we had already budgeted for the projects to be undertaken. It has commenced already and will be completed in 2026. The date, I am unable to confirm that right now, honourable Leader of Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will now move on to the third oral question for today. Honourable Members, please, note that Oral Question No. 307 of 2025 has dropped from the Order Paper, as it has been addressed in the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport on Wednesday, 26th November.

Effect of Cattle Diseases on the Cattle Industry in Fiji
(Question No. 308/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament on the effect of cattle diseases on the cattle industry in Fiji?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to convey my sincere appreciation to honourable Tuicolo for this very important question on the effect of cattle diseases in the cattle industry in Fiji.

This inquiry highlights a matter of national significance, drawing attention to the challenges faced by our farmers and the broader livestock sector and it was also raised by honourable Koroilavesau earlier this week. I bring this issue to the forefront because honourable Tuicolo has contributed meaningfully to the ongoing effort to strengthen animal health, safeguarding livestock and the support for sustainable development of the cattle industry, and also with respect to the movement of livestock within Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the cattle industry remains an integral part of the heart Fiji's agriculture sector. It has supported the livelihood of thousands of rural households and contributes to national food security through the production of beef and dairy products. Despite its potential, the industry continues to face challenges related to productivity, genetics, farm management practices and, importantly, animal health.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji, like many livestock producing countries, faces two endemic cattle diseases that pose risks to health and productivity, and this includes *brucellosis*, which is a significant infectious disease caused by a bacterium that affects the reproductive system of cattle. It leads to abortion, reduced fertility, decrease in milk production and overall poor health performance, which can create major economic losses to our farmers. The disease spreads through direct contact with infected animal and contaminated materials such as aborted foetus, placenta, or milk. During the last re-emergence of *brucellosis* in Fiji in 2009, 282 cattle were found with the infection and were concentrated in the Northern Tailevu region and other parts of the province of Tailevu.

Controlling *brucellosis* is a national priority, and efforts include regular testing and slaughter of infected animals, quarantine of infected herds, and movement regulation of cattle to reduce disease transmission. Since *brucellosis* is zoonotic, it can infect people through unpasteurised milk, handling of reproductive fluids and tissues, and slaughtered animals. So, it is essential to use protective clothing, gloves and footwear when visiting or working on infected farms.

Bovine tuberculosis is the chronic infectious disease caused by a bacterium that affects the respiratory system of cattle and could also spread through its entire body. It is typically transmitted through the inhalation of bacteria shared by infected animals, or through contaminated feed and water. Infected cattle may show signs such as weight loss, chronic cough, reduced milk production, and general weakness, although many animals remain asymptomatic in the early stages, meaning they cannot show these symptoms in the early infection stage.

Bovine tuberculosis poses serious economic challenges to Fiji's livestock sector because it reduces productivity, impacts trade, and requires strict testing and culling programmes to control its spread. Between 2018 and 2021, 3,012 cattle in Fiji were found to be infected with *bovine tuberculosis*, with particular concentration in the Central Division, especially in Tailevu and Naitasiri Provinces.

Effective management relies on regular herd testing, improved farm biosecurity, and cooperation between farmers and veterinary authorities to prevent further transmission and protect both, animal and public health.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, cattle diseases have significantly impacted Fiji's livestock sector, causing economic losses and disrupting the productivity of the industry. Some impacts of these diseases include:

- Economic losses where livestock disease reduces productivity by lowering beef and dairy production, increasing mortality, and raising farm production costs. This affects household income, national supply chain and increases our reliance on imports.
- Threats to public health where both, bovine brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis, are zoonotic in nature, and they pose risks of infection to farmers, veterinarians and consumers. Ensuring public health is, therefore, a central priority for our disease-control programmes.

Mr. Speaker, outbreak of diseases not only threatens the health of animals but also affect farmers and their livelihoods. The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways recognises the strategic importance of this sector and will continue to implement several measures to address the disease challenges, such as:

- strengthening animal health surveillance and diagnostics;
- national eradication and control programmes;
- genetic improvement and breeding programmes;
- farmers' capacity-building;
- strengthening water control and biosecurity measures;
- public and private partnership, and industry collaboration; and
- research and climate resilience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways remains fully committed to revitalising Fiji's cattle sector. Addressing cattle disease challenges is central to this effort. It will strengthen surveillance, improve veterinary services and farmer education, enhance biosecurity, and strengthens sector partnerships. I assure this august House that the Ministry will continue to provide technical support and resources to our farmers and stakeholders, and the policy leadership needed to safeguard the health of our national cattle herd and drive sustainable growth in the livestock sector.

HON. A.N. TUICOLLO.- For youth from the Western Division who are interested in subsistence cattle farming, does the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways have a list of farms where these youth can buy cows that are free from such diseases?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a database available in our Ministry. The TB Brucellosis Team in Koronivia has got all the number of farms that are tested-free to move cattle. They also have different status of diseases in different farms, where cattle can be moved between similar status of diseased farms. Rather than just moving cattle from free-tested holdings to other holdings, they can also be moved, depending on the different health status between the holdings. Thank you.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, you have talked about threats to public health, particularly, the zoonotic-related infectious diseases. However, you are well aware that one of the contentious issues when it comes to addressing this issue is the use of antibiotics and how they affect the immune system of consumers, particularly. Can you provide the House with an update on how the Ministry is addressing the use of antibiotics, together with the Ministry of Health?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the use of antibiotics to our livestock in Fiji, although it may not be for the two diseases that I had mentioned, but the Ministry also has a report by the World Organisation for Animal Health on the use of antibiotics to our animals, and

that is monitored against the total number of livestock that we have, which we also account for, and we will know the level of use of antibiotics on our animal and that will address the need for antimicrobial resistance in livestock.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Minister for advising this House on the two diseases which are common in Fiji and the Ministry is providing the technical support. Can the honourable Minister confirm whether compensation or a support package will be provided to farmers who lose their cattle due to these diseases?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, compensation is paid to farmers who send in their cattle that are tested. Unfortunately, some of the infected cattle, especially for TB, are detected at the abattoir, but were not tested. The Ministry is only responsible for paying compensation on cattle that are tested positive and are found to be positive, whether it is a total condemnation of the meat or the portions that are condemned. Only the portions that are condemned are paid a certain level of compensation.

HON. V. LAL.- Taking into account the cattle diseases, I would like to ask the honourable Minister, what measures are there in place to see that such infected animals are not sent to slaughterhouses?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- The infected animals have to be sent to slaughterhouses for removal. When we test, we will notify the farmers with those animals that are tested. For TB cattle, the disease can be localised only to parts rather than generalised. If there are generalised TB, the total animal will be condemned. If there are specific areas that are infected with TB, only those parts will be condemned. They will have to be taken to the slaughterhouse and other parts of the animal will be all right to be consumed. That is the nature of the TB. We have meat inspectors in slaughterhouses. They are the ones who can identify portions of the meat that are infected with TB.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, this is an appropriate juncture for us to suspend proceedings for our morning break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.28 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, can you please join me in warmly welcoming the students, teachers and the parents of Naivicula District School in Tailevu. You are welcome to your Parliament and I hope that your visit will give you some valuable lessons and insights into the working of your Parliament and its role as one of the three arms of the State.

QUESTIONS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that Oral Question No. 309/2025 has dropped from the Order Paper as it has been addressed through the Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Finance on Thursday, 27th November.

Similarly, the next Oral Question No. 310/2025 has been withdrawn by honourable Alikia Bia, as it has been addressed by the Minister for Finance in his response to Oral Question No. 256/2025. That leaves us with the last Oral Question for today.

Measures to Control the Spread of Termites (Question No. 311/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the measures put in place to prevent and control the spread of termites?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish also to thank honourable Usamate for raising the question regarding the control of termites. There is quite a number of termite species in Fiji, but I would like to focus my response this morning to the Asian Subterranean Termite.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years, the spread of the invasive termite species known as the Asian Subterranean Termite has posed a growing threat to households, public infrastructure and community assets. This pest is highly destructive, difficult to contain once established, and capable of causing intensive structural damage. Government agencies, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, Biosecurity of Fiji and Ministry of Forestry, have been working collaboratively to monitor affected zones and assist communities in implementing containment measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the infestation has been observed across multiple residential and commercial areas, especially in Lautoka, Nadi and Labasa, where termites have compromised wooden structures, household utilities and public buildings. Their ability to spread rapidly through soil and infested material continues to challenge our eradication efforts. Public awareness and early detection remain critical, and the Government has intensified its outreach through inspections, community trainings and technical advice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture sector bears significant risks from this infestation as termites do not limit themselves to damaging building structures, they also target crops, tree plantations and farm infrastructure. Their activity can -

- damage crops and young plants by attacking their roots and stems of various crops, particularly seedlings and softwood varieties, reducing plant vigour and lowering yield.
- threaten fruit trees and forestry species, for example, coconuts, citrus, breadfruits and timber species. In addition, other perennial crops are vulnerable to termite colonies that hollow out their stems or feed on their bark.

- impact soil quality and farm productivity whereby soil disturbing behaviours can weaken root systems and alter soil composition, affecting crop growth.
- increased productive costs for farmers, thereby, farmers face higher expenses for pest control, replacement of damaged material and rehabilitation of fields and farm sheds.
- long-term economic losses, reduced yield and damaged plantations can undermine the food security and lower income of farming households.

It is important to note that while termites have existed in Fiji for many years, the introduction of invasive termite species has intensified the scale and the spread of agricultural damage, particularly in densely cultivated or peri-urban farming areas.

In addressing these threats, the Government is taking a multi-pronged approach, as follows:

- Enhanced surveillance, meaning that Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Agricultural Extension and Forestry teams are carrying out more frequent farm inspections and mapping areas at higher risk to detect potential threats earlier.
- Targeted baiting and treatment programmes are carried out in hotspots such as Nadi, Lautoka and Labasa using approved bait stations and termiticides under strict standard operating procedures to ensure both effectiveness and safety for households and the environment. For the first time now, affordable baits are available locally from pest control companies and are widely available.
- Public and farmer education by providing training sessions for farming communities to help them identify termite activity, use safe treatment methods and prevent the spread of termites through soil, timber, and equipment.
- Strengthening quarantine measures by restricting the movement of potential host material such as timber, wood, demolition waste and soil from infested to non-infested areas to minimise cross-regional transmission.
- Research and technical support where the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is working with local and international experts on improved control methods, including environmentally safe baiting system and biological controls.
- Community partnership - the Government continues to collaborate with local councils, provincial offices and community leaders to ensure an integrated response.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has declared regions as “Biosecurity Emergency Areas” in response to the outbreak of Asian Subterranean Termites. Under this declaration, which was made under section 77 of the Biosecurity Act of 2008, the movement of termites and any termite-hosting material such as soil, water plants, timber, wooden furniture, logs and even crops like mangoes, cassava, sugarcane and coconuts, are strictly prohibited without prior authorisation of Biosecurity Authority of Fiji.

The ban is in place to contain and prevent the spread of these destructive pests, as they could cause serious structural damage and pose a threat to local ecosystems. Violations of the declaration incur legal penalties under the Biosecurity Act. Termite infestation is not only a household concern, but also an agricultural and economic challenge and requires vigilant coordination and sustained action.

I urge all Fijians to remain vigilant, report suspected infestation promptly to the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji and the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and the Ministry of Forestry to work with our officers and communities to prevent the spread of this destructive termite.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honourable Minister and Government for this initiative. A background to my supplementary question, when the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defense did their public submissions with BAF, we visited a household in Lautoka, a house owned by Francis, whose mother is bedridden. Three portions of their ceiling have fallen in, and their floor has sunk in as well. They have been reaching out to us, honourable Qereqeretabua and honourable Kiran had put it forward to her as well in the tearoom that if he can be assisted with this funding because his mother is bedridden, he is really worried, and he is the only person working and looking after his mum.

The question to the honourable Minister is, can you clarify whether BAF is looking at the severity of termite infestation and why is it argued that the termite assistance grant is on a first-come-first-served basis? Can the honourable Minister clarify the process that is involved in someone getting the assistance? When you go to communities, you hear all sorts of things so it would be best if it comes from the honourable Minister.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- It is not particularly the case that you had raised as an example, but as far as I know, there is assistance provided to those who are affected with termite. It would have certain procedures which includes inspection, assessment of the damages, and how BAF and the Ministry can work together to assist in certain areas. However, it is on first-come-first-serve basis. I believe those that had their homes infected and damaged first will probably be attended first, than those who are detected and assessed later. I am not sure whether it is part of that, but it is a normal practice that those who are reported and assessed first are more likely to be assisted first, than those who are detected later.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That was the last of our Oral Questions for today, honourable Members, and like yesterday, there are no Written Questions today, so question time is now over.

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as you have seen on today's Order Paper, we will deal with eight End of the Week Statements today. Each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes, with a 10-minute response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required, and there will be no other debate.

For the first question, honourable Bala is not present. I am given to understand that honourable Bala is presently consulting with the medical personnel. We hope it is nothing serious, and we wish him well. In the circumstances, his question will drop, that means the honourable Prime Minister will keep his response until later.

Progress on Economic Diversification in Fiji

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and fellow Fijians; good morning and *Ni Sa Bula Vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I rise to deliver my end of week statement, I wish to place on record my acknowledgement, and pay tribute to my former Personal Assistant, Agnas Shalini John, who passed away last week. We laid her to rest on Tuesday this week.

Agnas has served 34 years of unbroken service with the Government of Fiji, serving three Ministers with distinction, all three of which remain in Parliament as of now - honourable Premila Kumar, honourable Koya and myself.

On behalf of the people of Fiji and the honourable Prime Minister, I wish to place on record my gratitude for the service of Agnas to this country and more importantly, to her dear husband, Lawrence, and the John and Chand families, for allowing us to have Agnas serve us and serve the country for those three decades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to provide an outline, or a report card of sorts on the People's Coalition's initiatives with regard to economic diversification. Simply put, to genuinely re-engineer the economic architecture of Fiji and broaden its base.

I have, in this august Chamber, said that this side of the House brought back real democracy to Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Equally, this side of the House has started delivering real, genuine economic diversification for Fiji. The building blocks are being put in place, which will set up this country in the years to come. Allow me to explain, Sir.

When the People's Coalition took office in December 2002, it viewed economic diversification as a key priority. There had been a lot of focus on tourism. Key areas of interest were the ICT Sector, commercial agriculture, commercial aquaculture, fisheries and forests, education, tourism and many more.

It was also the belief of the Coalition Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that if we capitalise on Fiji's hub status in the Pacific, made trade and investment easier, worked with the private sector, and kept harnessing the MSME and cooperatives, we would be able to unlock Fiji's potential.

In March 2023, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I received a call from the Trade Commissioner of the US, Mr. Alike Cooper, that Google wanted to engage with Fiji on a possible series of connections from the US, South America, Australia and Southeast Asia to Fiji. Within seven months after meeting the honourable Prime Minister, Google announced their entry into Fiji. The potential impact to the economy is significant. Our ability to establish Fiji as a genuine ICT hub is now cemented.

We anticipate the ITC sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will rise to about 10 percent to 15 percent of GDP within the next 10 years and generate well over 20,000 jobs in this timeframe. This will mean, more opportunities for our young men and women in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) Sector alone, we have onboarded five companies from 2023, creating 300 new jobs. Five other BPO opportunities are being pursued.

The recent Reserve Bank Reports revealed that the foreign exchange earnings have reached \$300 million. We envisage \$500 million within a 10-year timeframe.

We have inquiries from cyber security entities wanting to set up hubs in Fiji. The starting salary of a cyber security analyst, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is between US\$40,000 to US\$50,000, or £30,000 to £40,000. I am not suggesting that we pay that salary in Fiji, but the fact of the matter is that the salaries of the young and women will rise. The shortage of cyber security analysts globally is around 4.5 million people, Sir, so Fiji will be well positioned to capture this opportunity.

The other positive developments have been the groundbreaking of the Lyndhurst Business Park, or Pacific Koro, which means that there will be available infrastructure to facilitate the growth

in this sector, plus the development of academies potentially through Google and a few other potential investors. Possible collaboration with one of our universities is also being planned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally, KPMG, which used to be just a chartered accounting firm, is now a fully-fledged BPO Centre, supporting part of their business in Australia. It now has 250 staff and growing to 200 or 300 very soon. It also houses an Artificial Intelligence Centre, which is delivering services to Australia. Sir, the potential is huge.

The other ICT initiative which we were able to launch was the licensing of Starlink. It has improved remote connectivity significantly and, as a result, not only Government services will be improved, but small business opportunities to all isolated parts of Fiji. This will greatly assist the rural economy.

Let me move to commercial agriculture, Mr. Speaker. The outlook for commercial agriculture is positive. We most likely will be able to do genuine commercial agriculture at scale. Imagine a Fiji where we can grow our own vegetables, drink our own juices and replace imports.

Fiji water has begun in Vanua Levu, focussing on citrus, mango, pawpaw and, hopefully, watermelons, with a view to produce and then value add. Aitken Spence intends to begin a model farm in Western Viti Levu very soon, with focus on pineapple, strawberries, cocoa, bananas and, possibly, palm oil in the long term.

To demonstrate, Mr. Speaker, what the private sector can do, Aitken Spence upon hearing about the Nadarivatu strawberry farmers, hired a vehicle immediately, to visit them just a few weeks ago. They believe they can assist these farmers and are asking to lease 10 acres up in Nadarivatu. Sir, Aitken Spence is a major producer of strawberries in Sri Lanka.

There is an Israel company as well being looked at, and they are intending to, at least, start with vegetables and vanilla commodities in Fiji.

We have ONA Coffee and Bula Coffee, who are building local coffee producer networks in Bua, Ra, Taveuni and in Nadarivatu, Mr. Speaker.

Goodman Fielder and Rooster are looking at producing feed locally, and this will translate into import replacement of about \$18 million, which will likely reduce the cost of poultry and also translate into cheaper prices of chicken.

Mr. Speaker, you have a cocoa farm being developed in Dreketi of over 300 acres by a New Zealand Fijian diaspora.

The Kava Bill is imminent, Mr. Speaker. The medicinal cannabis Bill is hoped to be tabled next year.

The Mahogany Bill is coming into Parliament, and this will correct a major injustice to the landowners of this country and, hopefully, allow Fiji to really reach its potential in terms of mahogany. Mr. Speaker, the bamboo industry is looking very interesting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are just examples of commercial agriculture, exploding around Fiji which will augur well for agriculture.

On the local front, just recently, a local commercial farmer sent six tonnes of pineapple to New Zealand. We found him on *Facebook*, and Investment Fiji facilitated the export opportunity.

Just imagine what will happen when this local farmer partners up with Aitken Spence.

The other strength of these investors, Mr. Speaker, is that most of them, ultimately, look to value addition and cooperative smallholder models to drive localised production. This means, income generation, market certainty for our farmers and, of course, engagement with the landowners of this country. These developments, together with investments in mechanisation by the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Commerce and Business Development, will generate greater productivity in terms of quantity and yield.

Mr. Speaker, we are also looking at commercial aquaculture. We are also looking at tourism. We now have genuine high-end tourism in this country, which means that tourism has been diversified, and I mentioned the Sofitel-Vatutalei Project, and also the Kese, Yasawa project.

Mr. Speaker, we are also looking at opportunities with Film Fiji and also education tourism.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of trade facilitation, there is ongoing work with PACER+, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with UAE, and this is how we will diversify the economy of this country.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Fiji is at a pivotal point. An experienced chartered accountant told me, he has never seen an investment pipeline so real and so genuine. It now stands at \$6 billion.

Mr. Speaker, the work done in less than three years, is not just a list of projects - it is the architectural design of the future we want for Fiji. It is an economy which is resilient, diversified, competitive, export-driven, digital, business-friendly, and future-ready.

We have not been painting walls, Mr. Speaker, we have been laying the foundations that future governments, regardless of political colour, can build on. The ultimate test of any house or any economy is, do the people feel safe to invest in it? Today, local and international investors are returning with confidence.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, this Government has not been patching a leaking roof - we have been constructing a new economic home -

- one where opportunity reaches every province, every community, every home, and every ordinary Fijian;
- a home grounded in diversification;
- a home wired for modern digital systems;
- a home with many rooms - tourism, agriculture, outsourcing, manufacturing, digital trade and services; and
- a home strong enough to face storms and open enough to welcome investors who want to come and grow Fiji.

This is the Fiji we are building, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is the Fiji we believe in, and this is the Fiji that is rising. *Vinaka saka vakalevu*, and may God bless us all.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Kamikamica for his Statement and I acknowledge the important work he initiated during his tenure, such as the Commercial Agriculture and Agriculture Taskforce, Smallholder Engagement Model, and the partnership with ONA Coffee, Fiji Water and Aitken Spence, to name a few. They have helped set the early foundation for diversification – the work that we are now strengthening and expanding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to support him and say that diversification is not optional, but essential for Fiji's resilience and long-term prosperity. For much of the past decade, our economy has grown around 3 percent on average. This maintains stability, but it does not build resilience. It leaves us exposed to cyclones, global shocks and climate-related disruptions. At this growth rate, every crisis has the potential to push us backwards.

Our National Development Plan is clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji needs to lift growth towards 5 percent and above, to reduce poverty, maintain and develop infrastructure, and build a competitive modern economy. That requires diversification, new industries, deeper value addition and broader participation. In the TOPEX Conference last week, this 5 percent growth was shared to the participants and there was positive feedback. The 5 percent can be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can allow our nation to be placed on a fragile position. We need to build a stronger, more resilient and a more competitive Fiji. We must expand our economic base, diversify our sources of growth and create new pathways for investment, innovation and employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of our progress, let me begin with a digital and knowledge economy, which presents major opportunities for us. Honourable Kamikamica has shared about the Google South Pacific Connect subsea cable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have an added advantage - we have a young, English-speaking workforce. We are well positioned to expand into high-value service exports, such as remote professional services, Fintech support, creative industries and regional data operations.

Honourable Kamikamica has also shared about the BPO sector, which already employs around 8,000, and more can be done in that respect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture and agro-processing continue to offer immense potential for rural development and food security. Honourable Kamikamica shed some light on some of the initiatives already in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also need to strengthen our supply chain, from the farm to the factory, and to the market, and that is to unlock new jobs and income for thousands of our Fijian households. At the same time, there are significant opportunities for our farmers to better connect with the tourism industry by supplying fresh produce, processed foods and niche agricultural products. Improving this domestic supply chain will not only support local farmers but also help the tourism industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the green and blue economy remains a pillar of our future growth as well. Fiji is blessed with significant ocean resources, rich biodiversity and natural assets, that can be leveraged sustainably. Opportunities lie in aquaculture, high-value marine products, sustainable fisheries management and ocean-based energy solutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we work to diversify our economy and reduce our reliance on a narrow set of industries, light manufacturing and packaging offer a clear path for Fiji to broaden its economic base. As I have mentioned before, our central location in the Pacific, well-established transport and logistic networks, and growing niche of doing business reforms, position Fiji to become a regional hub for value-adding processing assembly and packaging of goods designed for neighbouring island markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, innovation and entrepreneurship remain central to our economic transformation. I have shared this week about the businessNOW FIJI e-service platform and also the roll out on Starting a Business services. Furthermore, Sir, strategic public-private partnership will

continue to play a vital role in infrastructure, technology and climate resilient development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must openly acknowledge that there are challenges as well. Our small domestic market, our high logistic cost and vulnerability to global commodity prices that continues to impact our competitiveness. Also, there is climate change and natural disasters that normally impose heavy fiscal and economic burdens, often diverting resources from development priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, we have every reason to be optimistic about these challenges. Fiji has a dynamic private sector, a young and adaptable workforce, and a strong partnership with development partners and international investors. The reforms we are undertaking from ease of doing business improvements to sustain State-Owned Enterprises, restructuring and financial sector modernisation, are laying the groundwork for sustainable and diversified growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, Fiji's future will be defined not by the constraints we face but by the choices we make today. Diversification is a pathway to resilience, stability and prosperity with strategic planning, bold reforms, sustained investment, Fiji can build an economy that delivers opportunities for all Fijians today and for generations to come.

Skills Shortage Crisis in Fiji

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to draw an urgent national attention to a challenge that strikes at the heart of our economic future and social stability - the skills shortage crisis currently affecting our nation. This is not merely a labour issue, but a national issue that touches every sector - from healthcare to education, from engineering to agriculture, from tourism to technology, and we cannot afford to ignore it any longer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the crisis is that Fiji today faces an acute shortage of skilled workers across a wide array of professions. Businesses are struggling to fill vacancies. Hospitals are losing nurses and doctors. Schools are searching for qualified teachers, and construction projects are delayed due to the lack of engineers and tradesmen. The continued exodus has strained the country's workforce and with a shrinking working age population, Fiji now faces serious challenges in sustaining economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the chronic labour shortage is also impacting other key sectors, including tourism and the primary industries. Employers consistently face difficulty finding workers with fundamental technical skills. Tourism operators face shortages of qualified hospitality managers and construction firms struggle to recruit skilled tradespeople.

Technology companies cannot find competent developers and data analysts in sufficient numbers. As a country, we are investing heavily in education, yet the return on that investment is increasingly benefiting foreign economies. This trend must be reversed. Why is Fiji facing this national problem?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are three core reasons behind Fiji's current skill shortage crisis - migration, lack of incentives and limited career development pathways. First, on migration, over the last few years, Fiji has experienced a wave of skilled workers departing for Australia, New Zealand, United States of America and other destinations. Our nurses, carpenters, mechanics, teachers and IT specialists have become highly marketable overseas. This reflects the high calibre of our workforce, but it leaves our domestic economy struggling. When a qualified nurse leaves, it is not only a vacancy, but also a loss of experience, mentorship and service. When dozens or hundreds leave, the impact becomes systemic and critical.

Secondly, salary and allowances. Many nurses and teachers are leaving for jobs abroad, particularly in Australia and New Zealand because the recent pay increase cannot cushion the high cost of living and in some cases, allowances are not paid on time. If the issue remains unaddressed, Fiji's healthcare system and education sector will continue to operate in crisis mode. Without a solution focused dialogue, the shortage will only worsen, and Fiji's health care system and education sector will face mounting challenges.

Consequences of the skills shortage, the consequences are already visible. The shortage of teachers is affecting the quality of education. Today, more secondary trained teachers are filling gaps in primary schools. The quality of education is seriously compromised. The shortage of nurses and doctors is increasing, waiting time and burdening our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the construction sector is slowing - not because of lack of demand, but because of lack of manpower. Businesses are being forced to hire underqualified labour or import skilled workers at a high cost. This raises the cost of living and slows national development. It also affects national morale. When our young people see peers living and succeeding abroad, they begin to lose confidence in the opportunities available in Fiji. The skill shortage, therefore, is not only an economic concern, but also a social concern.

The way forward - a sustainable solution. We cannot simply plug the gaps as they appear. We must have a national strategy for skill development and retention. The solution must be long term, multi-sectorial and sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I propose the following strategic pillars. The first one is, incentivise workers to stay in Fiji. Improving retention through workplace culture and compensation - we must make it attractive for our skilled workers to remain in Fiji. This includes reviewing remuneration structures in critical sectors, offering performance-based allowances, and providing clear career progression pathways. We should not only compete with overseas salaries – we must compete with career satisfaction and national pride.

Review immigration policy strategically. Mr. Speaker, Sir, where critical shortages exist, we may need to strategically invite skilled professionals to fill temporary gaps. However, this must be done with balance and foresight, ensuring that our local workers are trained and upskilled in the process. Immigration should not be a substitute for national development - it should complement it.

A call for collaboration and national unity. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this skill-shortage crisis is not the responsibility of one Ministry, or one party, or one sector. It is a national issue which demands collective action. Government cannot solve it alone. We need employers to offer fair wages and clear pathways. We need tertiary institutions to evolve curricula.

We must also recognise that solving this crisis goes beyond economics - it is about identity and nationhood. Every time a skilled Fijian stay and contributes to this country, they strengthen our national pride. Every time we equip a young citizen with a skill that changes their life, we strengthen the foundation of our society.

Allocation of resources – Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government must be strategic in allocating resources to education, ensuring that funding is directed to areas where skills are needed most, so the gaps created by migration can be filled in a timely manner. Fiji's economic future is being held back by a deepening skills crisis that demands a major reset of the country's entire workforce system.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we act decisively and collectively now, Fiji can transform this challenge into an opportunity. We can become a regional hub for skilled professionals. Our

industries can grow, our youth can prosper, our families can remain together, our systems can become resilient. But to do this, we must invest in our people. We must see our workforce not as a cost, but as our greatest national asset. Let us build a Fiji where skills are nurtured, talents are retained, and opportunities are created at home. Let us not wait until the shortages become a crisis in every sector, let us act now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we owe this responsibility to our children and to all future generations. With unity, vision, and firm leadership, we can turn the tide.

MR. SPEAKER.- In the absence of the honourable Minister for Education, I now call on the Assistant Minister for Education, honourable Iliesa Vanawalu for his response.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Hem Chand for his statement on the skills shortage crisis in Fiji. As the Assistant Minister for Education, I stand today and elaborate on what the Ministry of Education and the Coalition Government are doing now what we already started, and now we are addressing the current skill-shortage crisis in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member has emphasised a lot on skills shortage but, has totally forgotten the blunders done by the previous administration which has weakened the skills sector and the effects of this can still be experienced in our nation.

I strongly agree that education is important, and as a Government, we are ensuring that our education system is modern, relevant and accessible for all youth in Fiji. Education without a pathway into work is a half-promise. At this point in time, I reaffirm that we are working on the bridge between education, skills training and employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under my leadership at the Ministry, we have reviewed the 59-year-old Education Act 1966, recognising that the current legislation is outdated and does not fully account for skills training, digital learning, inclusive education practices, teacher professional development or stronger school governance. The Education Bill, Part 5 - Curriculum Development and Assessment, section 23(3)(g) focusses on teaching of practical life skills in schools. Moreover, section 40(1) (d) emphasises on promoting technical and vocational education and training. We are promoting technical, vocational and apprenticeship-orientated training tracks (TVET) alongside academic pathways so our young people can gain practical, job- ready skills aligned with industry demands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government has introduced a number of innovative policies through Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service 2025-2026 scholarships budget was based on the premises and rationale to allow greater access for human capital development, to commensurate and mitigate loss of labour through migration and have demand driven skillsets. The budget is aligned to the findings and recommendations of the Review of Scholarship Priority Areas Report and Human Capital Development Plan (2023), trend analysis of historical investment data at TSLs and National Development Plan 2025-2029.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2025-2026 scholarships and grants allocations are based on feedback received from the labour market needs. The Coalition Government in collaboration with TSLs works closely with industry partners in determining the labour market needs. The following key industry partners made contributions in determining the scholarship allocations, the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, Ministry of Civil Service, Fiji Sugar Corporation, Goodman Fielder, Energy Fiji Limited, Flame Tree Developments, Air Terminal Services, Fiji Airways and Engineers Fiji to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government through TSLS, provides sponsorship from Certificate Level III till Diploma Level 5 under the Skills Qualification (TVET) Scholarships Schemes. The funding is available in the national priority areas to mitigate the skills gaps. In the last three years 11,172 students have been assisted under the scheme to undergo skills training. The Coalition Government has allocated another 4,760 scholarships in the new financial year to support skills training. Therefore, by end of 2026, a total number of awards under the Skills Qualification will be 15,932.

To address the immediate labour market needs, TSLS introduced Micro Qualification Competency Based Training Grants in the 2023-2024 National Budget. These grants are targeted for a quick fix labour solution to mitigate increasing shortages in certain industry sectors through micro credentials for semi-skilling purpose. As of last financial year, a total of 5,225 youths and adults have successfully completed the training. For the new financial year 2025-2026, another 3,000 micro qualification grants are available in the following categories:

- (1) Construction with 300 grants for basics of tile laying, painting, plumbing, block laying, joinery and cabinet making.
- (2) Tourism and Hospitality Industry with 500 grants for basics of housekeeping, restaurant service and front office operations.
- (3) Automotive with 300 grants for basics of panel beating and automotive painting.
- (4) Traditional Handicraft Making with 300 grants for basics of wood carving, tapa or *masi* and weaving.
- (5) Performing Arts with 200 grants for basics of dancing and music.
- (6) Community Tailoring with 300 grants for basics of sewing.
- (7) Women Small Business Operations with 100 grants for basics of bookkeeping and marketing.
- (8) Vocational Literacy and Numeracy with 1,000 grants.

By the end of 2026, a total of 8,225 students will be trained for quick fix labour solutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government is not just creating opportunities for learning, but also for entrepreneurship. In 2024-2025 National Budget, Graduate Business Start Up Scheme was introduced on 31st January, 2025. The TSLS co-launched the Graduate Business Start-Up Grant Scheme in partnership with the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation in offering training, resources and funding for new graduates with bold business ideas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of 21 TSLS-sponsored graduates have successfully completed the training with FCEF and have started up their own business. The Government will continue to support this scheme and has allocated 41 new awards for this financial year to be managed by FCEF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to add value to the scheme, a trilateral MOU was recently signed by TSLS, FCEF and University of the New South Wales (UNSW). The UNSW, under this MOU will provide assistance under the Graduate Business Start-Up Grant Scheme through FCEF by market research and product development. This partnership will empower graduates with funding, mentorship, and the support they need to turn innovative ideas into successful businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, TSLS manages the Apprenticeship Scheme, which was introduced in the 2023-2024 National Budget to incentivise apprentices by topping up \$2.00 an hour to the apprentice wage rate for maximum of 40 hours per week and up to 12 months. As of the last financial year, a total of 453 apprentices have been assisted, and the Government will also continue to support another 100 apprentices in the new financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Skills Qualification, Micro Qualification, Business Graduate Start Up and Apprenticeship Scheme, a total of 24,772 students will be trained and absorbed in the workforce. The Higher Education Commission Fiji (HECF), through the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), play a direct and transformative role in addressing the skills gap by aligning their programmes, research, and outreach activities with the realities of Fiji's labour market and community needs. Their contributions include:

- integrating skills development in secondary schools;
- re-engaging disengaged learners through Provincial Councils;
- conducting national labour market research;
- aligning qualifications and industry standards;
- delivering industry-relevant programmes;
- building stronger industry partnerships;
- promoting lifelong learning and upskilling;
- driving research and innovation; and
- expanding access through regional and online delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Employability Data 2024 states that institutions with employability are:

- Sangam Institute of Technology;
- Vivekananda Technical College;
- Fiji Airports Academy;
- Davuilevu Theological College;
- Corpus Christi Teachers College;
- Alphacrucis University College;
- Pivot Point;
- Centre for Tourism and Hospitality (CTI);
- Conservatorium of Dances;
- Montfort Technical Institute;
- University of the South Pacific;
- Vishan Infotech;
- Advance Aviation Training;
- Pacifika Communities University;
- University of Fiji;
- Makoi Women's Vocational Training Centre;
- Keshals Business Institute;
- Montfort Boys Town;
- Service Pro;
- Pacific Polytechnic;
- Pacific Technical Institute;
- Monfort Technical Institute; and
- LDS.

To conclude Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Assistant Minister for Education, as a citizen of our beloved Fiji, we all share a common vision for our nation. At this point in time, I want our youth, our families and our *vanua*, to know that we are not waiting for the future; we are acting right now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are reforming our legislation, modernising access, and will continue to work with TSLS, FCEF, HECF, HEIs and other key industry stakeholders in identifying the gaps and addressing skills shortages, which will lead to employment in Fiji. God bless us all and May God

bless Fiji.

Community Engagement in Control of Stray Animals on
Roads and Farming Communities

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the matter that literally haunts the darkness of our highways. It is an issue that every driver in the Western Division knows in the pit of their stomach. It is an issue that brings tears to the eyes of the sugarcane farmers and despair to the village mothers trying to maintain a food garden. I am speaking about the crisis of stray animals, specifically cattle, horses and goats roaming our roads and trespassing on our farms.

We often speak of the infrastructure in the House, we speak of potholes and bridges. However, the most dangerous obstruction on our Queen's Road and King's Road today are not potholes. It is a 500-kilogramme bull, standing invisible in the middle of the tarmac at 2 a.m., waiting for an unsuspecting family to drive into it.

The reality on the ground: The “killing field”. Let us be honest about the geography of the crisis. From Maui Bay in the Coral Coast, winding through the cane belts of Sigatoka, in areas such as Sorby Bay, Lawai Village to Narata and Valley Road, Kulukulu, Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park Visitor Information Centre, Waibogi, Malaqere, Semo, Lomawai, Navatu, Bavu, Nabou Pine, Malomalo in Nadi, passing through the heavy traffic of Lautoka and Ba, and stretching all the way to the open plains of Yaqara in Ra, the Western Division has become a hazard zone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have driven these roads at night, and many of us have. You grip the steering wheel a little tighter. You scan the verge of the road, not looking for scenery, but looking for a flash of the eyes in the headlights. When an accident happens – they happen far too often – the devastation is total. We have lost breadwinners. We have seen vehicles destroyed. We have seen tourists who come to enjoy our paradise leave with trauma or injuries because a horse or a cattle is lurking in a blind corner. What happens after the crash? This is the part that angers our people. The driver crawls out of the wreckage, the police arrive, they look at the animal and are silence. Why? Because no one owns the animal. Suddenly, it is a ‘ghost animal’. The police are helpless. They look for a brand, but there is no brand, or the brand is so overgrown or poorly done that it is invisible.

In many cases, unscrupulous owners have deliberately not branded the animal to avoid registration fees or taxes, so the police cannot charge anyone. They cannot seek compensation for the victim. The owner of that animal, who is likely sleeping comfortably in a village or settlement, stays silent. They know if they claim the animal, they claim the liability, so let the animal rot, and let the victim suffer in silence. This is a failure of the justice system, and the happening is every week in the West.

The agricultural heartbreak: The story of the road is half the story. A step off the tarmac and go into the farms. I have spoken to sugarcane farmers in Ba and Tavua and to the mothers in rural settlements who rely on backyard gardening to feed their children. Imagine the heartbreak of a farmer. He borrows money to buy fertiliser. He spends months toiling in the sun to plant cane or vegetables. He watches his crop grow, calculating how this harvest will pay for his children's needs. Then in one night, a herd of stray cattle breaks through the weak fence and by morning, months of hard work are gone, trampled, eaten and destroyed.

Areas that have sustained heavy crop losses are Bilalevu in Valley Road, Maro, Naidiri, Tagitagi and Natadola. Just to give an example, one particular farmer, Mr. Abdul Abbas, from Natadola, has lost several acres of the *duruka* eaten by cattle, horses and goats. Under the Trespasses of Animals Act (Cap 169), the farmer is technically entitled to compensation. The law says that they

can claim damages, but again, I ask the question, who does he sue? If the cattle are unlisted – which so many are – the law is a toothless tiger. The farmer calls the police, they chase the animal away, but they cannot touch the animal. Without an unidentified owner, there is no justice. The farmer absorbs the loss, and the cycle of poverty continues.

The failure of the current system: Mr. Speaker, Sir, you must look at why our current laws are failing us. We have Brands Act (Cap 169), which requires branding. Let us be modern in our thinking — branding is a 19th-century technology for a 21st-century problem. Branding is painful for an animal. It damages the hide, but most importantly, it is hidden and difficult to police. A police officer at the crash site at night cannot read a smudged brand on a dark animal. We have the Pounds Act, but our pound system is overwhelmed. We have funding, yes, but it is not sufficient to cover the vast expenses of the West. We do not have enough trucks and manpower to chase wild bulls through the bush.

Let us speak about the culture of ownership. In many of our villages and settlements, we have a *vakavanua* approach to livestock. We love to own cattle. It is a sign of wealth and tradition, but ownership implies responsibility. Many people want the wealth of the animal, but they do not want the cost of the fence. They let the animals roam free on the roadside verges to eat grass, because it is a free feed. They treat the Kings Road like a long paddock. This is not farming, but negligence, and it is criminal negligence when it costs life.

A modern solution is the microchip revolution: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot solve this problem by simply telling the police to work harder. They are already overstressed. We need to give them the tools to do the right job. We need to bring Fiji's livestock management to the digital age. I am proposing and I am advocating strongly for the introduction of mandatory Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) or microchipping for all cattle in Fiji. This is not science fiction. It is a standard practice overseas. New Zealand does it, Australia does it. Even our neighbours are moving this way.

Why microchipping? The reasons are as follows:

- It is permanent - you cannot cut a microchip out of an animal without surgery. It is there for life.
- It is instant - if there is an accident, the police do not need to be the cowboys. They need a simple hand scanner. Beep. The number comes up. The number is linked to the national database.
- It is undeniable - the database tells us the number of the animal and the owner, and which particular phone number it is and the settlement.

Imagine the change in the behaviour Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the cattle owner knows that his animal can be identified in five seconds, if he knows that when his animal causes an accident, the police will be knocking on his door within an hour. Do you think he will let the animal roam free? No, he will fix his fence, and he will tie the animal up. Accountability breeds responsibility. Right now, we have no accountability, so we have no responsibility.

The role of community: However, technology alone is not enough. We need community. I call upon the *turaga ni koro*, advisory councilors, *sardars* of the cane-harvesting gangs and the community leaders. You know who owns the cattle in your village. You know who is letting them loose at night. When you stay silent, you are complacent to the next accident. When a taxi carrying a pregnant mother hits an animal from your village, and you know who the owner is, but you say nothing, you are failing in your duty of care to the nation. We need to empower community leaders to act as the first line of defence. We need to revisit the concept of community pounds, where

villagers can secure stray animals and charge the owners a release fee that goes back into the village development fund. Turn the problem into a solution for the village.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, this is not just about the animals. This is about law and order. This is about food security. This is about the safety of the families. In the 'Wild West' days of cattle ownership must end. The days of police sending helpers on the roadside must end. I urge the Ministry of Agriculture to look seriously at a pilot programme for microchipping in the Western division — from Sigatoka to Ra. We need to invest in the scanners, we need to subsidise the chips. The cost of microchips is a few dollars. The cost of life lost on our roads is immeasurable. It is time to wake up from this danger. We must fence our animals. We must take them. We must keep our roads and our farms safe for everyone.

At this juncture, I wish to commend the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Mr. Tukana; SAO of Nacocolevu Research Station, SAO Banuve; staff and Mr. Rajesh, another SAO, the Minister for Agriculture and Waterways and the Assistant Minister Kuridrani for making the utmost effort to control stray animals in Sigatoka and the Western Division as a whole.

However, they need the support of this Parliament in terms of advocacy, and the Government must consider giving emergency funds to supplement the existing funds so that awareness programmes are carried out in our villages, settlements and concrete effort is made to round the pool of stray animals so that comes this Christmas, our roads are safe to our visitors and members of the public.

Similar to the Crime Prevention Committee, which has been very successful over the years. Let us form a Stray Animals Prevention Committee to tackle this issue head-on. Come the new year, let us give the security and confidence to our subsistence farmers in the rural areas who carry out vegetable farming and got their farm without the fear of stray cattles, horses and goats.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am honoured this afternoon to receive the response to End of the Week's statement, and I wish to acknowledge the honourable Nand for his comprehensive and insightful statement on the community engagement and control of stray animals on roads and communities. I think that heading alone speaks for itself, community engagement and control of stray animals on roads and farming communities. The statement highlights a manner of significant public interest touching not only road safety users, but also the welfare of our communities and the agriculture sector, and I appreciate his effort in raising awareness and outlining the challenges and potential solutions in this area.

Now according to that, incidents causing fatality on road users are speeding, careless driving, drunken drivers and the list goes on and right at the end, we have the risk from animals on roads. The responsibilities on stray animals lie with animal owners and our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways recognises that the stray and roaming animals, including dogs, cats, cattle, horses, and other livestock, present serious threats to agriculture, public safety, and community wellbeing. Over recent years, the Ministry has implemented comprehensive programmes and regulatory measures to address these challenges.

The key activities include the Stray Animal Control Programmes. The Ministry of Agriculture runs a dedicated Stray Animal Control Programme within its Ministry of Health and Animal Division, one of the six Divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture. This involves field work to capture, impound, manage and then, when appropriate, rehome or auction unclaimed stray animals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise here the need to microchip our animals in the West. There are regulations that are required to be in place to address the introduction of technologies like microchipping. One that we have currently that we are using is the branding of animals. That alone is not being observed when the animal is impounded. When they do damage on crops, that is when people do not want to own animals. When we capture them and impound them so that they will be ready for sale, the unbranded cattle, that is when people would want to come and claim the animal.

We are facing these difficult situations, and that is the work that we do. In terms of microchipping, people will say that is not their animal, even though it has got the microchips. We have had those situations in the past even when they are branded, people will say that they have already sold those branded animals to other people. When it comes to impounding, that is when they will want to claim that that is their animal. But when it comes to crop damage, that is when they will not want to own that animal.

Trapping, Neutering/Desexing and Release for stray dogs and cats: The Ministry often collaborates with the municipal councils and animal welfare organisations and conducts trapping, neutering and the release campaign. This is desexing dogs and releasing them back into communities. Fortunately, some of those released dogs normally go back and do damage to other defenceless livestock like pigs, sheep and goats.

Licensing and Registration: The Ministry enforces licensing and registration of dogs and other animals where relevant and ensuring animals identify their ownership traceable and responsibilities for their care and upheld, and licensing of dogs. A lot of other dogs are not licensed because they have to pay for a levy for licensing, and this is simply to enable them to get the system working for them to provide. Even a lot of dog owners do not license their dogs. As I said, when it poses a complaint, that is when they do not want to claim their dogs.

Impounding and Holding Facilities: These are the pounds through the provision of the relevant Acts. The Ministry maintains livestock and dog pounds across Fiji where stray or roaming animals can be temporarily kept. Animals not reclaimed within the legally specified time may be auctioned.

The Ministry also continue to do a community awareness and responsible pet ownership campaign. The ministry conducts these campaigns to pet owners and livestock handlers, and this will include proper housing, feeding, veterinary care, confinement, and avoidance of abandonment.

Inter-Agency Collaboration is quite a lot of collaborations the Ministry does with other animal welfare organisations and also local towns and city councils. Of these efforts, over the last three-year period, the Ministry captured over 2,700 stray animals, demonstrating a significant commitment to addressing stray animal issues in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to carry out these functions, the Ministry draws from several pieces of legislation and regulations. These legislations are by far the oldest legislations in Fiji, and we are currently working and continuously reviewing these legislations. We have the:

- (1) Pounds Act 1877;
- (2) Trespassers of Animals Act 1955;
- (3) Brands Act 1928;
- (4) Dog Act 1968; and
- (5) Animal Protection Act 1954.

Through our Regulatory Unit within the Animal Health and Production Division, the Ministry is mandated to use these laws to respond to complaints, impound stray or roaming animals, maintain pounds, and, when necessary, manage and auction unclaimed livestock according to the legal provisions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry emphasizes several reasons why stray animals must be managed.

In terms of our funding, the Ministry is allocated \$596,000 for the implementation of the Stray Animal Control Programme for this year. We have a number of constraints, and I think our audit laws hinder effective stray animal control, by failing to address the current challenges and enforcement gaps in modern animal welfare standards. We seem to be working with a lot of difficulties.

To conclude, strengthening the legislative regulatory framework by reviewing the outdated animal control laws to define pet/animal ownership responsibilities, and penalties for neglect, implementing mandatory registration for domestic animals, including strict licensing requirements for breeders. However, the challenges remain significant, requiring consistent community cooperation, responsible animal ownership, and adequate resources for enforcement and animal welfare.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for his statement. We have only one more End of the Week Statement, but in view of the time, I will entertain a suspension motion.

Before that, I wish just to relate to the issue of cattle on the road at night – it is nothing new to these chambers. I am aware that it was phrased initially, and I am reminded of a contribution by one of the Members of Parliament in the Legislative Council before independence in 1970. I cannot recall the name of the Member himself, but I am sure honourable Fayaz Koya's father would have, because we had shared the joke also. When the issue of cattle on the road at night posing a danger to drivers was raised - the Member of Parliament suggested that the hurricane lantern should be compulsorily tied to the tails of each of these cattle.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- So, there is a solution still, I think but I am sure the researchers can dig up the record from the old days. It was, in fact, but I must say, the farmer was from the West, the Member of Parliament.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- We will move on to our suspension motion, and for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6, so much of Standing order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 12.30 p.m. to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to complete the End of Week Statements.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members the floor is open for debate. Are there any other intervention? I do not see any.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as I had indicated, the Statements by honourable Manoa Kamikamica and honourable Rinesh Sharma have both been withdrawn, and that leaves us only with the last End of the Week Statement by honourable Kuridrani.

Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I present my End of Week Statement, firstly, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Tutu Rural Training Centre in the island of Taveuni and the Fulton Adventist University College in Sabeto in Nadi for their unwavering commitment to advocating for the education of our youths in the field of agriculture. Their dedication to empowering young people with essential skills and knowledge is an achievement beyond measure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the impact of their work extends far beyond classroom. By equipping youths with practical agricultural expertise, they are contributing to improved livelihoods, strengthen food security and a more resilient national economy. Their efforts continue to inspire hope and create opportunities for our new generation of young farmers, innovators and leaders. With a vision, leadership and remarkable contribution to youth development. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Tutu Rural Training Centre and the Fulton Adventist University College.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to highlight the critical importance of the Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute (NATI), and to underscore the vast potential it holds for our youths and indeed for economic and social future for Fiji.

The value of the legacy of NATI - Mr. Speaker, Sir, Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute located at the Muanase, Navuso in Naitasiri is a historic institution established by the Methodist Church in 1923 on 1,300 acres of land. It has long been a cornerstone of agriculture education.

Over the past ten decades, NATI has indicated what are often called replacement farms, equipping them with just farm, but to lead, to innovate and to contribute to the backbone of our economy. Navuso has played a significant role in the development of rural youths over the past ten decades through its training programme, not only in Fiji but also in other Pacific Island countries. This was so because it was the only institute that was offering a Certificate in Tropical Agriculture.

A lot of reputable agricultural specialists and leaders in the Pacific were graduated of Navuso after completing a three-year training programme during those days in the 1960s. Whereas in 60 were

places allocated for students from other Pacific Island Countries. Through the years, the School has gone through its many areas of success and failures. The School continues to learn from its failures and build on its success, which had allowed it to remain standing at this point in time and continue to deliver its core original function, the training of future replacement farmers of Fiji.

Nevertheless, it is the Fijian government's continued support to the school through the provision of annual grants and that has enabled the institute to remain operational today. Under the stewardship by the Methodist Church in Fiji, the operation grant from the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and the education grant from the Ministry of Education, I want to thank honourable Radrodro for continuing to support NATI in terms of their education grant and tertiary student loan scheme. This has enabled the school dropouts and less privileges to acquire basic knowledge and skills in agriculture. Through these grants, Navuso continues to operate both as a vocational and an agricultural technical institution. Importantly, NATI is registered as accredited by the Higher Education Commission of Fiji as a vocational provider.

Educational training programmes at NATI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now speak about the key programmes offered at Navuso, because they are the heart, of why the institute is so vital for Fiji's youth and our future.

- (1) Certificate in Agriculture, Level 4, is a three-year Higher Education Commission of Fiji accredited programme that combines practical farming skills, farm management training, and entrepreneurial support to prepare graduates for sustainable agriculture careers.
- (2) National Certificate in Agriculture and Dairy Production, Level 2 is a 11-week industry developed HFC accredited programme, that equips young farmers with practical skills in calf rearing, pasture nutrition, milk quality, animal welfare, and fencing for Fiji's dairy sector. Practical life skills and holistic development, the institute complements its financial training with life skills, supervised farming experience, and strong character development, while also empowering students through practical support such as allocated farm plots, production and maintenance of crops, organised harvesting and marketing, accumulated savings through their individual bank accounts, all of which culminates in the acquisition of land to help them begin farming in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to the programme offered at NATI, the institution has partnered with Israel International Development Agency (MASHAV) through a Memorandum Of Understanding to deliver a learning by doing programme that sends NATI students to Israel for 11-month agriculture trainings. During the programme, students work five days a week on farms and spend one day studying in advanced farming technologies gaining skills in areas such as irrigation, high-tech farming, greenhouse production, and pest control and sustainable practises. The initiative supports Fiji's broader cooperation with Israel, to strengthen agriculture capacity, improve food security, and build climate resilient infrastructure, that has so far sent 30 NATI students to the Arava International Centre for Agriculture Training in Israel.

The students have been praised by the institution, MASHAV organisation, and the Israel Government for their exemplary behaviour, positive attitude, and steadfast commitment to the role throughout their 11-month stay in Israel. The group also won the top award for the best project, award of FJ\$10,000. A second cohort of 14 students departed on 13th November, of an 11-month internship at the Ramat Negev International Training Centre for Advanced Agriculture where they will also complete a diploma in advanced agriculture.

The social and economic opportunity through NATI. Mr. Speaker, Sir, why does all these

matter so deeply for Fiji's future? I want to draw everyone's attention to several key opportunities and contributions to the NATI office. It offers opportunity for youth that must be seized, an opportunity for this Government and Parliament must continue to support.

One is addressing the ageing farmer's population. One of the most pressing challenges in our agriculture sector is the ageing of our farmer's base. NATI plays a vital role in training young and capable farmers to replace and rejuvenate this workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am running out of time, and I will just touch on the strategic needs and calls to action. To fully realise the potential of Navuso, there are several strategic areas where, we as Government, Parliament and stakeholders must focus our efforts on:

- sustained and enhanced funding; continued investment is needed not just for infrastructure, but for modern tools, durable equipment and more farm enterprises.
- stronger partnership will strengthen collaboration with private agriculture enterprises, cooperatives, banks and international partners to improve graduate market access financing.
- awareness and recruitment – the Higher Education Commission of Fiji recommends better marketing of NATI.

To conclude, I emphasise that NATI is not merely a school, it is a national strategic asset. It is a place where young people gain skills, values and support to build sustainable livelihoods, strengthen their communities and grow into compassionate capable leaders. When we invest in NATI, when we encourage our youths to enrol and when we support its growth, we do more than grow farmers, we grow Fijians who can shape our future. Therefore, I call on all of us, this Parliament, the various Ministries, local communities and private sector partners to double down on our support for NATI.

Let us ensure that more young Fijians take advantage of what NATI has to offer. In doing so, let us tackle fundamental challenges such as unemployment, food security, rural poverty and economic stagnation. To the youth of Fiji, NATI is your opportunity. To my colleagues, let us be enablers. To the Government, let us commit to making NATI a centre of excellence, not just for today, but for generations.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to add my full unreserved support to the statement made today by the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, honourable Kuridrani about the critical role that Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute has in playing and shaping a brighter future for Fiji's youth and by extension, confronting many of the social and economic challenges we face as a nation.

Sir, NATI is a cornerstone of youth and national development. It reduces urban drift and preserves social coherence in building a new generation of agro-leaders and innovators. NATI prepares graduates to lead cooperative farmers, agribusiness ventures, agro-processing facilities and community-based agriculture projects, empowering leaders who understand both rural realities and business in agriculture.

In conclusion, by investing in institutions like Navuso, Tutu Rural Training Centre, Fulton College and similar training centres, we are investing in the future of our nation. We are giving our youth dignity, opportunities and purpose. We are building resilient communities, strengthening our food security and laying the groundwork of sustainable economic growth rooted in our land and our people. I wholeheartedly support honourable Kuridrani's statement and urge all the honourable Members to join me in supporting this vital cause.

MR. SPEAKER.- I do apologise, honourable Members that I said that that was the last End of Week Statement. I have just been informed that the honourable Shalen Kumar has made it back in time to deliver his End of Week Statement.

Achieving Social Cohesion in a Multi-Ethnic Fiji

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank you for allowing me to contribute to this august House about the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs and some of the programmes and activities it is undertaking to promote social cohesion. At the outset, I must thank the honourable Prime Minister for having confidence in me to hold the position of Assistant Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs. I am also grateful to honourable Charan Jeath Singh for guiding me as I make inroads in the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am extremely humbled by the opportunity to be part of the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs. This is an extension to what I have been doing for a long time, saving the people in resolving issues and ways in which they can come together. I strongly believe in working with people and getting the major races together, a task that the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs is also undertaking in earnest, that is, promoting social cohesion.

Social cohesion, rests on fundamental truth. Nations prosper when their people feel a sense of belonging, when communities participate meaningfully in national development, and when our diversity is embraced as a source of collective strength. Our Ministry is committed to being the bridge that brings communities together, nurtures mutual respect, and reinforces the bonds that hold our nation together. Social cohesion is not a destination, but a continuous journey, and Mr. Speaker, Sir, we remain committed in our resolve to ensure that Fiji remains peaceful, united, and confidently moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I come from a humble background where race and ethnicity were never barriers. They were simply part of the fabric of our everyday life. Growing up in rural Viti Levu, I lived side by side with families of every race and religion. We learned together, worked together, celebrated together, and faced hardships together. These experiences shaped my values, my worldview, and the person I am today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I say with pride that I am in many ways a product of social cohesion - a living example of the harmony, respect, and unity that we strive to strengthen across our beloved nation. The Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs was created to help build a more cohesive, inclusive and compassionate Fiji. The vision of the Ministry is for all communities - iTaukei, Indo-Fijian, Rotuman, Banaban and the others to feel respected, valued and heard.

Social cohesion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, rests on four foundational principles - belonging, inclusion, participation and recognition. These principles guide the Ministry's six strategic priorities that strengthen community-based organisations, enhance access to government services, deepen cultural understanding, and support evidence-based policy and research. They form the framework through which we seek to build a more connected, confident and united Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as this House is aware, my Ministry has been re-established after a lapse of more than a decade and a half. Yet today, I can proudly say that we have made our presence felt across the country, and the people know us because our work is visible in their communities and in their lives. Our strong footprint on the ground is a testament to our commitment, service, and partnership with the people.

I wish to place on record my sincere appreciation to the Coalition Government and to our honourable Prime Minister for having the vision and confidence to revive this Ministry. Their leadership has enabled us to restore an essential institution that strengthens unity, inclusion, and national cohesion in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me highlight some of the work that the Ministry is undertaking, that is helping us to forge the bond of social cohesion:

First, the Ministry successfully hosted the *Girmit* commemoration in Labasa in May this year. The Ministry is now working on holding next year's celebration in Suva. There are multiple activities planned to include tree planting, *Girmit* time capsule, *Girmit* recipe cookbook, *Girmit* commemorative stamp release, to name a few. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has introduced its grant programme for this year, which has received over 1,000 applications. The vetting process has now been completed and field verifications are currently underway. Very soon we will finalise and announce the list of successful community- led projects.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you may have seen the honourable Minister commissioned a number of projects completed from last year's grant cycle. His efforts have received considerable praise. Like him, I am also proud to have these projects completed. I am informed that communities across the country are genuinely grateful to the Ministry and to the Government of the day for the available grant initiative. The Ministry also has been having community consultations around the country. This has allowed the Ministry to understand the needs of the communities and find ways that they could be helped.

The Ministry also has several notable capital projects underway, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These include the ongoing Tuatua Gas Crematorium project, the *Shraadh Ghat* developments in Labasa and Lautoka, the *Girmit* Records Digitisation project, the refurbishment of Lautoka *Girmit* Centre and preparatory work for the state of art - *Girmit* Museum. In addition, the Ministry is planning to convene a national social cohesion conference in March 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's initiatives are important in advancing social cohesion in our country. I have personally seen and heard of the tremendous work carried out so far and of how these programmes have brought people together, both in moments of grief and in times of celebration. They are helping to strengthen the bonds that hold our communities together. As an Assistant Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am inspired by the substantial work the Ministry is already undertaking to promote social cohesion across our communities.

However, I firmly believe that as a nation, we can, and we must go even further. We have a collective responsibility to deepen our unity, strengthen mutual respect and build a truly inclusive Fiji where every citizen feels valued and heard. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the foundation of social cohesion is first built in our homes, in the values we instill, the respect we teach and the examples we set for our children. When unity and understanding begins at home, that naturally extends into our schools, our communities, and ultimately into the fabric of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on the foundation, our young people become the true architects of a cohesive Fiji. We must strengthen multicultural curricular that teach our shared history, civic responsibility and conflict resolution skills. We must expand school exchanges and join extra-curricular programmes so that friendships are formed early across communities. We must invest in youth leadership initiatives that intentionally bring youth together from all backgrounds to learn, lead, collaborate, and innovate side by side. Economic opportunity must be felt fairly across Fiji. This means targeted support for disadvantaged communities through skills training, micro-finance and enterprise development. It means ensuring that public procurement and development programmes create equitable opportunities for all regions and ethnic groups. And it means

monitoring labour market participation and wage gaps so that policy is informed by evidence, not assumptions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our cultural diversity is one of Fiji's greatest strength. We must continue supporting community-led cultural festivals and language preservation programmes that enrich our national story. Where practical, we must ensure that Government services and essential public information are accessible in the major languages used across Fiji. Genuine inclusion means giving communities a voice. We must strengthen local forums and municipal councils so that they reflect proportional representation from our diverse society. We must produce citizen deliberation on local development priorities to reduce resentment and build trust in Government processes.

To sustain peace, our justice institutions must be fair, accessible and trusted. Access to justice and dispute resolution mechanisms must be timely, affordable, and culturally sensitive. Police and public servants must continue to receive training in cultural competency and non-discriminatory practise. Community policing partnerships must be strengthened to reduce fear and improve accountability between communities and law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are serious about strengthening social cohesion, then we must also be serious about measuring it. Success cannot be left to guesswork. It must be tracked, monitored, and understood through clear evidence-based indicators. We must therefore monitor the extent to which our children interact, learn, and participate together through multi-cultural and inter-school programmes, employment and income parity, public trust in our institutions, and inter-group attitudes, the incidence and timely resolution of communal tensions. These indicators give us a true picture of our progress and help ensure that social cohesion is not just a policy aspiration, but a lived reality for our people. Achieving social cohesion is not a single programme or a short-term initiative - it is a continuous national endeavour that requires courage, discipline and a shared sense of purpose. It calls upon every one of us, especially those entrusted with leadership, to rise above division and lead with integrity, fairness and vision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all honourable Members, let us rise to the moment. Let us be the leaders who strengthened unity, nurture understanding and shape a Fiji where every citizen feels valued. It is never too late to do what is right. Social cohesion is, and will remain, the only sustainable path for our nation to move forward together, stronger and proudly multicultural. May God bless you all, and may God bless our beloved Fiji.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for sharing the work of the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs in this area. Social cohesion is a complex and nationally significant issue. While often our tensions have been framed around ethnic lines, our conflicts have been deeply rooted in many factors including historical, social and economic tensions. The current Government has prioritised social cohesion, which is central to the National Security Strategy, viewing it as essential for fostering long-term peace and stability.

The Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been established and has been conducting hearings around various impacted communities in the Northern, Western and Central Divisions. There is still a lot of pain and fear in our nation and many people who are coming to the Commission have chosen to have closed hearings, but the establishment of the Commission has created an opportunity for people to talk about their intergenerational pain. The Commission has created an opportunity to talk and we hope that through this process we can look back at our political upheavals, causes and try and ensure that these are not repeated. The Commission has created a safe space for genuine healing for our nation and its people, and I thank all the stakeholders and development partners who have provided support to the Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, peace is too precious to be left to chance, especially when we look at conflicts all around us. This Government is making every effort to work towards social cohesion and peace building. In 2024, in partnership with the United Nations, our Government launched a Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding Programme. Through civil society partners, there are dialogues and trauma healing workshops being run in communities across the nation.

May I take this time to pay tribute to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), it takes a lot of courage to look at your past and take responsibility for your actions. We must acknowledge that our soldiers who served in some of the most war-torn countries have been bringing back their traumas to our shores with no support in the past of dealing with their post traumatic stress. In addition, they are laden with pain and guilt of the role of their employer, the institution that has had a role in different political upheavals, so, there are many different layers of healing work that is happening within that institution.

We must give the leadership of RFMF credit for the work they have undertaken within, and as they reach out to the civilians. They started the process with the Great Council of Chiefs as our tradition dictates. Let us give them space as they continue to work through their processes and give credit where it is due. They have continuously shared that they are rolling out a process towards civilians and let us just pause and give them credit.

The spread of racially charged rhetoric and disinformation on social media is seen as a clear and present danger to social cohesion, and we are hoping that through the Online Safety Commission legislation review, this can be dealt with soon. But I call on political leaders, and everyone to rethink the way this is being done. I urge the nation to look deeply at the causes of our tensions. Hurt people, hurt people, so, it is important that each one of us looks at how we are dealing with our own historical pain, and take the time to heal ourselves, and before we post anything online, or in a rush share anything online, let us ask the question: what is really our intention - to create more division, hate or to really build peace?

To different Ministries, there is work happening, like we have heard from the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is also working on social cohesion. It is happening in different layers. So, I hope that every concerned citizen, every patriotic citizen, every agency that is working hard to heal the nation we all love are supported. We cannot be sidetracked by those with political motives to keep us divided. A lot of this work has been long time coming, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we need patience and ask Fiji to support every effort of healing and nation building being undertaken by various stakeholders.

The Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission has also been reaching out to the diaspora to start listening to them. There is counselling and trauma healing provided for anyone who is stepping forward. So, I hope that people utilize this process and collectively, if we all put our intentions collectively to rebuild this nation. If you look in our region or around the world, there has been, just like the long COVID-19 tale.

The impacts of the different *coups* we have is continuously impacting us across the generations. So, we have to as leaders, make pause and collectively decide how we are going to move forward. I am hoping that not only the leaders in this House, but our leaders in our faith traditions and in our communities will take the time to pause and utilize these mechanisms for healing, especially as the local government elections are announced and we are coming into election, how do each politician relate themselves towards either nation building or to breaking the nation is something they should be judged by? I hope that we will collectively work towards social cohesion, and hope that we will be responsible in the way we are dealing with social media. May God bless Fiji and heal our beautiful nation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Without prejudice, and for me personally, the honourable Assistant Minister and the Minister's contributions to close our week has been very refreshing and something I hope each one of us to take home for the weekend.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 1st December, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting this week, and I thank all of you for your contributions throughout this week. I now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 1st December, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.54 p.m.