

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 25TH MAY, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	688
Communications from the Speaker688-692,718
(1) Welcome	
(2) Tribute to the <i>Girmityas</i> and Descendants	
(3) Arrangement of Sitting Week Business & Waiver of 21-Day Response Period	
(4) Attendance at Workshops and Seminars	
(5) Absence of Members During Parliament Sittings	
(6) Withdrawal of a Tabled Committee Report	
(7) Committee of the Whole Parliament – Education Bill 2025	
(8) Survey on Quality of Services	
(9) Voter Registration Services	
(10) Coca-Cola Games	
Ministerial Statements	692-707
(1) Update on the Fijian Economy and Fiscal Response to the Global Fuel Crisis - Hon. E.Y. Immanuel	
(2) Update on the Progress of the Implementation of the Forestry Act 2025 - Hon. A.V.B.C. Bainivalu	
(3) Update on the Education Reforms – Hon. A.M. Radrodro	
Questions	707-743
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) ADB’s Financing Facility - PHIT Project	(Q/No. 17/2026)
(2) National Disaster Risk Financing Policy 2026-2031	(Q/No. 30/2026)
(3) GP PPP Scheme and Lab PPP Scheme	(Q/No. 52/2026)
(4) Millenium Challenge Co-operation - Fiji and USA	(Q/No. 64/2026)
(5) Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Mutual Defence Treaty	(Q/No.65/2026)
(6) Labour Management Consultation and Cooperation Committees	(Q/No. 66/2026)
(7) Direct Air Connectivity - Fiji and European Markets	(Q/No. 67/2026)
(8) Inspection/Enforcement Mechanisms – Unsafe Solar System Units	(Q/No. 68/2026)
(9) Procurement of Waste Management Equipment	(Q/No. 69/2026)
(10) TSLs Scholarships and Tertiary Funding Assistance	(Q/No. 70/2026)
(11) Equal Access to Special Education Services	(Q/No. 71/2026)
(12) Financial and Logistical Support – Specialised Medical Treatment	(Q/No. 72/2026)
(13) Plans for Introduction of Crop Insurance Cover	(Q/No. 73/2026)
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Detailed Schedule – Road Construction and Maintenance	(Q/No. 74/2026)
(2) Pilot Tourism Micro and Small Enterprises Fund	(Q/No. 75/2026)
(3) Statistics on Unplanned Electricity Outages	(Q/No. 76/2026)
(4) Performance of Housing Authority	(Q/No. 77/2026)
(5) Operational and Financial Outputs – Yellow Ribbon Programme	(Q/No. 78/2026)
(6) Status of the Digital Agriculture Initiative	(Q/No. 79/2026)
(7) Statistics on Teacher Positions - Ministry of Education	(Q/No. 80/2026)
(8) Status of Capital Projects – 2025-2026	(Q/No. 81/2026)
(9) Statistics on Government Vehicles	(Q/No. 82/2026)
Suspension of Standing Orders	735
Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026	743-747
Education Bill 2025	748-778
Review Report – FPTCL 2020 Annual Report	778-784
Review Report – CAAF 2024 Annual Report	784-790
Review Report – FNPf 2025 Annual Report	790-802

MONDAY, 25TH MAY, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro, Minister for Education

Hon. Charan Jeath Singh, Minister for Public Enterprise and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts

Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry

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

Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

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

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

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Information and Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs

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

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Viliame Naupoto, Minister for Immigration

Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Minister for Policing and Communications

Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bilitavu, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

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

Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

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

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

Hon. Aliko Bia, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Ratu Josai Bulavakarua Niudamu, Assistant Minister for Justice

Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva, Assistant Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Sachida Nand, Assistant Minister for Commerce and Business Development

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

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

Absent

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs
Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 1st May, 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings, thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Honourable Members, can you, please, bear with me, as I have some pertinent matters to raise this morning.

Tribute to the Girmitiyas and Descendants

First, is a tribute to the Girmitiyas and descendants. Honourable Members, 10 days ago, on the 15th of May, we celebrated Girit's Day - a national celebration in recognition and honour of the *Girmitiyas*, who were brought from India to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 to work on our sugar cane plantations. Much has been written of their struggle and in the end, their survival, and more importantly, through their resilience and fortitude, they have endured and, in the process, have contributed enormously to the development of our country.

Some of our Girit descendants have moved elsewhere into the world, seeking greener pastures with better opportunities and future for themselves and their children. By and large our emigrants have made a success of themselves and so have their children. The successes have been mainly in the private sector, but most recently, two *Girmitiya* descendants and both women no less, have dared history by becoming Members of Parliament of Westminster in London and the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood, Edinburgh.

First, the honourable Sureena Brackenridge, Member of Parliament for the British Parliament, representing Wolverhampton, Northeast Constituency. Her grandparents, she informed me when we met in October last year, had emigrated from Fiji to the United Kingdom in the 1960s and had stayed. She was first elected to Westminster in 2024. Some of you, honourable Members, have had the pleasure of meeting her on our visit to Westminster in October last year and February this year. She is full of energy, vivacious and an active member of the multi-party friends of Fiji and the Pacific Association established two years ago. I watched her pay tribute to the *Girmitiya* forebearers from the floor of Westminster last week.

Early this month, Sumitra Kumar was elected to the Scottish Parliament, representing Edinburgh Southwestern as a Member of the Scottish National Party. As our local dailies reported, honourable Sumitra Kumar grew up in Samabula, just a few miles from here. She attended Dudley High School and only emigrated with her parents to Scotland in 1987 at the age of 17. She has made it to Holyrood in a very short time and an ethnic minority at that, speaks volume of honourable Kumar's talent, fortitude and tenacity.

All I can say to the two ladies is that the Fijian Parliament is very proud of you and your achievements, and Members congratulate you - honourable Brackenridge and honourable Kumar, on your successes. In the words of the spirited cheers of my eldest granddaughter, "you go girls!".

Arrangement of Sitting Week Business and Waiver of 21-Day Response Period

For the information of honourable Members, the Business Committee has considered the arrangement of business for this sitting week, particularly, in relation to the scheduling of Ministerial Statements and the progression of debates on Bills before the House. Honourable Members are advised that Ministerial Statements should only be scheduled for Monday - 25th May, 2026 and Tuesday - 26th May, 2026, with no Ministerial Statements to be taken on Wednesday and Thursday. This arrangement is intended to provide additional time for the House to consider and debate Bills before Parliament this week.

Furthermore, honourable Members are advised that pursuant to Standing Order 20, the Chair has approved the waiver of the 21-day response period under Standing Order 121(6)(b). This waiver has been granted to facilitate the timely progression of proceedings and to allow the debate on the Standing Committee Reports to commence today - Monday, 25th May, 2026.

Attendance at Workshops and Seminars

In the intervening period since we last met, your Secretariat, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), engaged your good selves in a self-assessment seminar on Sustainable Development Goals, which our Parliament first undertook in 2017, (the first Parliament, I remind honourable Members, in the world to do so), as we aligned ourselves to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I thank the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members from both sides of the aisle, for their attendance.

Then, a week later, in collaboration with the UN/UNDP, the Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection and your Secretariat, we engaged you once more in helping Members understand and, more importantly, appreciate the significance of the data compiled by the UN experts on the topic of Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index Assessment. I think we all agree, at least, amongst the honourable Members who made the efforts to attend, how absolutely important, a Member's awareness and understanding are, of the meaning and the significance of the data and the need to raise the SCORE percentage for a Fiji that is more cohesive and resilient, especially so in the context of the ongoing work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I thank all those honourable Members who attended the SCORE Awareness Dialogue.

If you will allow me to make an observation and comment on the two Dialogues. It is disappointing that despite the invitation of the Chair for honourable Members to make every effort to attend them, and only some of you did, with the understanding that those who were not involved were away on official business or public duties, I remind honourable Members that great efforts, including expanding resources and expert personnel, are made available for honourable Members of Parliament on important topics and themes that in the considered view of your leadership were important components of your work as Parliamentarians.

Common courtesy too, I might add, would have obliged those not attending, for one reason or another, to inform the organisers and the Secretary-General of your absence. We should recognise that at the end of the day, outside the international agencies, including NGOs, have voluntarily expanded their own resources, including time and personnel, to help our system of governance function in the most efficient and transparent way in the service of our people.

Absence of Members During Parliament Sittings

Honourable Members, there is a matter of concern regarding the absence of certain Members of Parliament during parliamentary sittings. While some honourable Members notify the Secretariat of late arrivals, it has been observed that they often enter the Chambers much later than indicated, remain only briefly, and thereafter, absent themselves for the remainder of the sitting. In addition, there are instances where some honourable Members attend only the morning session, and do not return following the suspension breaks without sufficient justification.

Honourable Members are advised that such attendance patterns diminish the effectiveness of parliamentary proceedings and undermine the dignity and orderly conduct of the House. At the end of the day, you as Parliamentarians and representatives of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, are responsible and answerable to the people of the country.

Withdrawal of a Tabled Committee Report

For the information of honourable Members, I have issued a directive and guidance to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the withdrawal from Parliament of the

Standing Committee's Consolidated Review Report on the 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Reports.

The Standing Committee Report was tabled on 1st October, 2025. Having tried to resolve this matter over the past six months, I now deem it pertinent to invoke Standing Order 20 for the purposes of ensuring effective oversight and scrutiny.

The Consolidated Review Report on the 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Reports is hereby withdrawn from Parliament for further scrutiny by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, and the Standing Committee, having undertaken further scrutiny, shall table its report in Parliament.

Committee of the Whole Parliament - Education Bill 2025

The Business Committee has resolved and approved the procedural arrangements for the Committee of the Whole parliamentary stage later today on Education Bill 2025. Honourable Members will recall that before the Third Reading of the Bill, the House must resolve itself into the Committee of the Whole of Parliament to consider the Bill Clause by Clause.

In line with the Standing Order 87(3), the Business Committee has agreed that Clauses of the Bill, including the Schedule, will be grouped in Parts, and accordingly, debate and voting during the Committee stage will proceed on the basis of the sequential Parts of the Bill, rather than on individual Clauses. This arrangement is intended to ensure that the proceedings are conducted in an orderly and efficient manner.

The Business Committee has also resolved that the voting of the Committee at the Committee stage will be through acclamation, but the voting at the Third Reading stage will be conducted electronically.

Survey on Quality of Services

Honourable Members, the Parliament Secretariat is currently conducting a survey to gather feedback from honourable Members on the quality of the services that are provided by your Secretariat. The survey seeks to assess satisfaction with service delivery, performance, customer service, logistics and administrative processes, whilst identifying areas for improvement and addressing potential service-related issues.

To date, only 18 honourable Members, including the honourable Prime Minister, have participated in the survey, and the Secretariat respectively seeks the full participation of all remaining honourable Members. Honourable Members are advised that the survey QR Code has been placed on your tables for Members who have not participated in this survey.

Voter Registration Services

Honourable Members, arrangements have been made in collaboration with the Supervisor of Elections, to provide voter registration services at the Small Committee Room during the sitting week from today, Monday, through to Thursday, between 8.30 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. Services will include new voter registrations, updates of voter details, replacements of voter cards and general voter registration inquiries.

Honourable Members, I encourage you to take advantage of the initiative to ensure that your voter registration details are current and up to date. At this juncture, I extend our gratitude to the

Supervisor of Elections, Ms. Ana Mataciwa, for her collaboration.

Coca-Cola Games

Finally, on a lighter but still celebratory note, I think I share with the QVS old scholars here and elsewhere, the joy in the long-awaited victory of its Athletic Team at the Coca-Cola Games, after 33 years since the school won it. Let me share a slice of the school history surrounding these events which I had shared with the honourable Prime Minister and some honourable Members. Prior to the last victory of 1993, the QVS Athletic Team's success was in the doldrums.

One evening around 1991, a number of old boys sat around the tanoa at the Club House in Toorak and brainstormed on how we could help the School's Athletic Team achieve some success at the Coca-Cola Games and wrestle away the victory from Marist Brothers High School, Suva Grammar School, Natabua High School and RKS.

Through my family connection, I knew the late Father Tevita Kabakoro (Tui Naweni) of the Anglican Church and former Fiji champion high jumper, and also a friend in the late Mr. Rogers from Nukuwatu Settlement, who were both trainers and officials of the Fiji Athletics Association. I volunteered their services to be made available to the school, and during the four weeks' lead up to the Coca-Cola Games, I, and the late Chief Executive Officer and once a champion javelin thrower of secondary schools, Mr. Jonetani Galuinadi, took Father Kabakoro and Mr. Rogers to the School every Saturday to train and coach the athletes. The success was almost instantaneous, and if my memory serves me right, the School won that year - 1991, when the competition was still run on points system. The medals system was first introduced in 1992, and the meeting then was won by Marist Brothers High School, before QVS grabbed it back for the last time in 1993.

The irony of it all is that both Father Kabakoro and Mr. RRogers were Marist Brothers High School Old Boys, and it took another Marist Old Boy, Mr. Banuve Tabakucoro, for QVS to revisit the glory days of 1993. I am reminded of the famous quotation by General Sun Tzu, the Chinese General who won the Nobel Peace Prize, who once said, "if you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear results of a hundred battles". So, I have no doubt that Marist Brothers High School, Suva Grammar School, as well as RKS, will come back fighting next year.

Honourable Members, we will proceed to the next item in today's Order Paper.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development;
- (2) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry; and
- (3) Minister for Education.

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

Update on the Fijian Economy and Fiscal Response to the Global Fuel Crisis

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide an update on the recent global developments, its impact on fuel prices and the economy, and the measures Government is taking, to

support our people and businesses. As requested, this Statement covers all the questions that are related to the global fuel crisis, our economy and the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC). Some of the Questions were questions from the Parliament Sitting in April – Question Nos. 03/2026 and 31/2026, as well as new Questions – Question Nos. 89/2026, 103/2026 and 117/ 2026, which are all related to the current global fuel crisis, the effect on our economy, as well as the role of FCCC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the global economic outlook has deteriorated sharply following the outbreak of war in the Middle East. However, prior to the conflict, the global economy was showing encouraging momentum, supported by strong investment, ease in trade tensions, and supportive financial conditions. However, the escalation of the conflict has significantly weakened confidence and disrupted the recovery path in the global arena.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the conflict is expected to impact the global economy through higher commodity and fuel prices, rising inflation, disrupted supply chains and tighter financial conditions. Increased energy costs are already feeding into transportation, food, fertilizer and manufacturing prices worldwide.

Financial markets have also become increasingly volatile. In its April 2026 assessment, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised down global growth projections and warned that downside risks remain substantial should the conflict persist or intensify.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the conflict has triggered a surge in crude fuel prices, rising by nearly 70 percent from around USD65 to over USD110 per barrel. However, refined oil prices, which we pay when importing from Singapore, in fact, have increased by over 150 percent, as refinery costs have also increased significantly.

The overall increase in fuel prices in such a short span of time is unprecedented and has been compounded by increasing freight and insurance cost, adverse currency movement, forced majeure or suspension of fuel contracts and fuel companies required to compete in spot-based procurement with higher premiums.

In regard to domestic Impact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji, as a small open economy that is heavily dependent on imported fuel, is highly vulnerable to external oil price shocks. Rising global fuel prices continue to have significant implications on the economy, including increased inflationary pressures in the future, higher business and transportation costs, impacts on tourism and investment activity, and added pressure on Government finances and our balance of payments.

While uncertainty surrounding future global fuel supply remains a concern, Government has been proactive, actively engaging through diplomatic channels and working closely with our international partners to secure fuel supplies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the impact of the global fuel price on Fiji is becoming increasingly challenging, as rising fuel costs continue to place pressures on critical providers such as Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), Fiji Airways, bus operators, fuel importers and other fuel-dependent industries. These services are essential to the functioning of our economy and the daily lives of our people. Any major disruption to electricity supply, transportation or fuel distribution will have serious consequences on our business, households, employment, public finances, national security and overall economic activity. Such disruptions must, therefore, be avoided, and Government has responded in a measured and well-calibrated manner.

On 21st April, 2026, Cabinet approved the redeployment of around \$56 million within the existing 2025-2026 Budget to respond decisively to the impacts of the global fuel crisis. This does not involve any new borrowing. Rather, it reflects a prudent and responsible approach by Government to prioritise funding from projects that we can delay or lower-priority projects, towards urgent national needs during this crisis. These includes contributions to the third and fourth cane payments. The third cane payment was made in April, and the fourth cane payment will be done this month. Our objective is clear, to protect livelihoods, maintain essential services, support economic activity and cushion the impact of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has adapted swiftly to provide targeted relief to protect over 130,000 social welfare recipients with a 50 percent top up in their monthly allowance for three months at an additional cost of \$34 million. We had provided \$4 million to support bus operators and ensure uninterrupted public transport services with a 10 percent bus fare subsidy. In addition, Government has already removed a full 20 cents per litre duty on diesel for all bus companies.

To safeguard the energy security and maintain reliable electricity supply, Government had provided fuel rebates to Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) for four months from April to July, including 20 cents per litre on diesel and 12 cents per litre on heavy fuel oil. The total fiscal revenue foregone for providing fuel duty concessions to bus operators and EFL is \$9 million.

Other sectors, like inter-island shipping, also receive a full 20 cents per litre duty on diesel. Furthermore, kerosene and premix already zero duty, while kerosene sales have zero net.

Government had also supported Fiji Airways through relief on certain fees and charges, together with Government assurance that the national airline will be protected during this crisis, and further measures will be provided in the next month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently, the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), as the country's independent price regulator, approved a 22.5 percent increase in bus fares and an interim fuel surcharge of 5.91 cents per kilowatt hour for EFL. These measures were necessary to support the continued provision of bus services and ensure the security and reliability of electricity supply.

The Coalition Government stands committed to protecting our people, our businesses and the broader economy during this crisis and, therefore, will be absorbing the 22.5 percent increase in bus fares as announced by FCCC, on top of the existing 10 percent bus fare subsidy that existed before. That means that none of the approximately 350,000 Fijians who rely on bus transport, including students using blue and yellow cards, as well as adults using red cards, will not pay any additional bus fares despite the increase in fares. Government will fully absorb the 22.5 percent increase at an additional fiscal cost of \$2 million per month.

For Rural Service Licence (RSL) providers and boat operators providing transportation service to students, Government will also support, with additional vouchers to cater for the increase in their fuel cost.

Currently, more than 57,000 domestic electricity customers receive electricity at a subsidized tariff of 17.67 cents per kilowatt hour, which is lower than the normal residential tariff of 34.01 cents per kilowatt hour and at an annual cost of approximately \$10 million to Government. So, none of these customers will bear any additional cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will also expand this subsidy of 5.91 cents per kilowatt hour to all Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that have an annual gross income turnover of less than \$30,000.

For residential customers with a household income above \$30,000 as well as commercial and industrial customers, EFL will pass on this fuel surcharge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite an increasingly challenging global environment, the Fijian economy has continued to demonstrate resilience in the early months of 2026. Visitor arrivals expanded by around 4.6 percent in the first four months of the year, while investment activity also remained supportive, underpinned by growth and new lending for investment purposes, as well as stable building material prices. Currently, we have an investment pipeline of over \$8 billion which is an increase of over \$1 billion in over one and a half months.

The financial sector has been sound with ample liquidity in the banking sector and low interest rates on the back of accommodative monetary policy stance by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF). Currently, we manage to keep interest rate low to support growth. However, with sustained fuel supply and price hike pressure, it will provide cheap prices on rates rising in the future.

Foreign reserves as well remained at a comfortable level of around \$3.4 billion with a retained imports cover of around 4.9 percent and is projected to remain sufficient over the medium term. However, with prolonged fuel supply and price pressures, we can see pressure as well on our reserves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government's fiscal performance during the first nine months of the year continued to reflect resilience and prudent fiscal management, despite an increasingly difficult global environment. From August 2025 to April 2026, the Government collected around \$2.9 billion in revenue and recorded expenditures of around \$3.2 billion, resulting in a deficit of around \$370.5 billion which is equivalent to -2.6 percent of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, total revenue collections at the end of April, we exceeded our forecast by around \$71.5 million, or 2.5 percent. This strong performance was driven largely by tax revenues, which were above forecast by over \$101 million, reflecting continued strength in economic activity, employment, consumption and tourism-related sectors.

The stronger-than-expected tax revenue performance was broad-based. Value-Added Tax (VAT) increased, as well as corporate tax, personal income tax and departure tax.

Total Government expenditure at the end of April 2026 amounted to \$3.2 million, representing 68.1 percent of total budgeted expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our total debt stock at the end of April stood at around \$11.0 million, equivalent to around 78.8 percent of GDP. However, Sir, the outlook has become increasingly uncertain due to the escalating geopolitical tensions and ongoing disruptions in the global fuel market.

The RBF has cautioned that these developments are expected to place upward pressure on inflation, increase business operating costs, and weigh on household spending, tourism demand and investor confidence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to respond to a number of questions that were raised as I was not here in the April sitting. Concerns that have been raised regarding the current situation. I wish to assure this august House that Government will continue to act in a responsible, prudent and measured manner in responding to the current fuel crisis.

The Government has already implemented targeted support measures to the bus industry and

EFL to cushion the impact of rising global fuel prices and maintain essential services. At the same time, it is important to recognise that fuel-related taxes remain a significant source of Government revenue that finances critical public services, including healthcare, education, social welfare, infrastructure and national security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a complete removal of fuel duty across the board would result in a revenue loss of more than \$150 million and would materially weaken the Government's capacity to continue delivering these essential services and supporting vulnerable communities. Instead, the Government has adopted a more balanced, targeted and fiscally responsible approach.

The question on the methodology used by FCCC in determining fuel prices, the Commission applies a Lowest Cost Operator principle in setting fuel prices on a monthly basis. Fuel and LPG prices are determined using a transparent pricing methodology that reflects changes in international refined fuel prices, exchange rates, shipping costs, taxes, and regulated wholesale and retail margins. This methodology is not arbitrary - it is an approved regulatory framework, agreed upon by both, the FCCC and the suppliers. The main objectives of FCCC's petroleum price control are to:

- ensure fair and reasonable returns;
- maintain transparency in the fuel pricing structure;
- stabilise domestic fuel prices; and
- protect the consumers from price gouging and excessive margins.

Fiji is an import-dependent island nation, and fuel imports are priced according to regional benchmarks, often linked to refined products in Singapore. The FCCC uses the Means of Platts Singapore (MOPS) benchmark.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, questions have been raised regarding the April fuel pricing and whether FCCC deviated from its methodology. I wish to clarify that there was no deviation in the fuel pricing, rather FCCC exercised its regulatory discretion to extend the pricing window to better reflect rapidly escalating global prices. The methodology is in place and has continued to be used.

Another question was related to what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the relief fuel subsidy funds are passed on to passengers. I must say that the implication of bus operators are somehow lining their pockets at the expense of ordinary passengers is both unfair and disconnected from the realities currently faced by the bus industry. The Government has chosen to do nothing. A few would like to be standing here today, questioning why bus fares were allowed to rise and why ordinary Fijians were not being protected.

For the AUD30 million in budget support from the Australian Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the support is timely, as a grant financing provided through general budget support. It will strengthen the Government's overall fiscal position and help preserve fiscal space to maintain essential services and approved support measures, particularly at a time when households and businesses are facing fuel and cost of living pressures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to talk on the question on the contingency plan that the Government has. As I had mentioned before, Government finances are stable and revenues have performed in line with our initial projections. We are aware of the rising downside risk on our growth, softer demand and elevated living shocks. These developments may place pressure on our revenue collection in the months ahead, particularly, if geopolitical tensions continue to disrupt global trade, tourism flows and fuel supplies.

Government has been actively exploring a range of contingency measures and fiscal

safeguards, to ensure that public finances remain sustainable and that essential services continue without disruption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that the duration and volatility of this crisis remain uncertain. Global fuel markets continue to be highly unpredictable, and there is no clear indication as to how long this crisis will persist.

Nonetheless, we remain committed to closely monitoring global developments and will continue to assess our policy options carefully. We will act cautiously to ensure that any decision taken remains sustainable over the medium to long term, while protecting the integrity of Government coffers and maintaining fiscal sustainability.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, while the Government hides behind the convenient shield of external shock and Middle East conflict, let us be completely honest with our people of Fiji. This Administration drastically and completely failed to prepare for the early signs of this global crisis.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, the public has not forgotten the initial statement made by the honorable Prime Minister, who assured the nation that there was no fuel crisis and promised that there would be absolutely no price increase for, at least, three months back in March.

Mr. Speaker, what happened? Overnight, FCCC dropped a bomb on consumers, introducing a staggering price hike. Diesel shot up by 70 percent and unleaded by over 20 percent. Kerosene went up from \$1.69 to \$2.99 today. Unleaded from \$2.44 to \$3.18 today. Diesel from \$2.14 to \$3.82, an increase of 93 cents.

It is clear that the honourable Prime Minister's Advisors have completely failed him, leaving the Head of Government completely detached from the harsh reality facing ordinary citizens, or rather it was the other way around, that the honourable Prime Minister did adhere to the advice given by him and went on to give the statement, not knowing that the price are regulated on a monthly basis.

Mr. Speaker, the Government boasts about redeploying \$56 million to manage this crisis, but these reactionary measures are little too late and too little. They are band aids on our gap wound. The Government announced fuel subsidies - 20 cents a litre per diesel and 12 cents per litre for heavy fuel for EFL, and to stabilise the power bill.

Despite this *ad hoc* incentive, electricity tariff of \$5.91 per kilowatt, as an increased fuel surcharge has still gone up, placing double burden on already struggling families and businesses. When the initiative was announced, we said that these are done on an *ad hoc* basis - it is not a complete result from point A to point Z, but still the Government went ahead without listening to the Opposition.

Inflation is spiraling out of control. The price of essential commodities, food and basic services is skyrocketing, completely wiping out the delayed social welfare top-up before they even hit the people's pocket.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Minister of Finance's Statement, paints a rosy picture of measured and well-calibrated steps, however, the ground reality tells a different story. Fuel companies across Fiji are currently facing severe cash flow issues due to unsustainable wholesale

margin and the skyrocketing cost of purchasing fuel in US dollars. If the Government continues to mismanage this sector, we will move past the price crisis very soon and see a severe shortage of fuel in Fiji, grinding our transport and industries to a total halt.

Mr. Speaker, we must ask a critical question. Why is there absolutely nothing for our taxi operators, minibus operators and other transport sectors, such as courier companies and logging trucks? The Government has allocated \$4 million to the bus companies. I must ask, why only bus companies? When something happens, why does this Government start to subsidise bus companies?

However, thousands of taxi and minibus operators who operate on the exact same poor roads and purchase the same expensive fuel have been entirely ignored, Mr. Speaker, entirely ignored! They have received zero subsidy and zero targeted fuel relief from this Government, forcing many to operate at a complete loss. Do their families not matter to this current administration? Do their livelihoods not matter to this administration? A failure of strategic planning by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rural and maritime communities will suffer the most from this rising fuel cost. Boat operators, carriers, and transport providers servicing the outer islands are already struggling with higher operating expenses. For many families in maritime Fiji, transport is not a luxury, it is a necessity for food supplies, medical access, education and economic survival. Yet, the Government has failed to provide targeted relief for these vulnerable communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, businesses across Fiji are also being pushed to the brink. Increased fuel prices have led to higher transportation, freight and shipping costs, along with the overhead cost going up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many micro, small and medium-sized enterprises already operate on a very narrow margin, and this rising cost threatens closure, reduced operating hours and job losses. When businesses suffer, ordinary workers and families suffer along with them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister's Statement confirms what we have known all along - this Government does not have a strategic roadmap to steer Fiji through this crisis.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- They are operating purely on an *ad hoc* reactive basis, clutching at the budget reallocation and imposing Civil Service hiring freezes when they should have built economic buffers months ago.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to put people first. Fiji deserves proactive leadership, clear communication and structured relief, and not broken promises. I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think this is a convenient time to suspend our proceedings for our morning break. We will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.26 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 am.

Update on the Progress of the Implementation of the Forestry Act 2025

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, and viewers tuning in live; *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this morning to provide an update to this august House on the implementation progress of the Forestry Act 2025, a landmark reform initiative that will shape the future direction of Fiji's forestry sector for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, forests remain one of Fiji's most important natural assets. They contribute significantly to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, watershed protection, economic development, rural livelihoods and the wellbeing of our landowning communities.

Mr. Speaker, Fiji's forests support livelihoods across our rural and maritime communities, while also contributing to national development through timber production, ecotourism, watershed protection, renewable resources and climate change mitigation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Forestry Sector, therefore, required a modern and responsive legislative framework that was capable of addressing current and future challenges facing the sector. The previous Forest Act 1992 served Fiji for many years, however, over time, it became increasingly evident that reforms were necessary to reflect evolving international standards, emerging environmental challenges, technological advancements, changing market expectations and the increasing importance of sustainable forest management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Forest Act 2025 represents one of the most comprehensive forestry sector reforms undertaken in Fiji in recent history. The Act establishes a modern legal and governance framework that strengthens accountability, promotes sustainable forest management, improves landowner participation, enhances environmental protection and creates stronger mechanisms for industry regulation and long-term sector growth.

The implementation of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been carried out through a structured implementation plan over a period of approximately two years and divided into three major phases. This phased approach has been adopted to ensure that implementation is practical, coordinated, properly resourced and supported through adequate awareness, training, institutional strengthening, stakeholder engagement and development of supporting operational systems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before elaborating further on implementation progress, I wish to formally acknowledge the support of our development partner, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), for its continued technical and financial support to the Ministry throughout the review and implementation process of this legislation. The Ministry deeply appreciates ADB's ongoing commitment towards strengthening Fiji's forestry governance systems and sustainable forest management framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to acknowledge the significant contribution of a forestry expert from Tasmania, Mr. Graham Wilkinson, who has generously continued to provide his technical expertise and guidance to the Ministry throughout the drafting and implementation phases of the Forestry Act 2025. His contribution has greatly assisted the Ministry in ensuring that the legislation reflects international best practices while remaining practical and relevant to Fiji's local forestry context.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most important aspects of the Forestry Act 2025 is that it fundamentally broadens the scope of forestry governance in Fiji. The Act moves beyond the traditional focus on timber extraction and instead adopts a holistic approach to forest management that incorporates sustainability, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, restoration, research, compliance, accountability and equitable benefit sharing.

The Act introduces several major reforms and improvements over the previous legislation. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act establishes an updated objective, guiding principles and general obligations to ensure that forestry decisions are guided by principles of sustainable forest management, environmental stewardship, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and intergenerational equity. The Act also emphasises the importance of scientific research, climate change mitigation, forest restoration, reforestation and protection of ecosystem services.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the legislation introduces a modern governance structure for the Forestry Sector. This includes clearer functions and responsibilities for the Conservator and the Department of Forestry, the establishment of a Forestry Advisory Council to improve stakeholder participation, and the creation of an independent tribunal to hear technical appeals and disputes arising under the Act.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the revised Act significantly modernises Fiji's forestry licensing framework. Under the legislation, new categories of licences are now provided for, including forest management licences, non-timber forest products licences, import and export licences for forest products, and wood processing mill licences. This strengthens oversight across the forestry value chain, while supporting improved industry regulation and traceability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another major reform under the revised legislation is the introduction of Forest Practices Plans and the new Code of Forest Practices. Under the previous legislation, the regulation mainly focuses on timber harvesting operations; however, under the reviewed Act, all forestry activities categorised as forest practices will require proper planning, certification and compliance monitoring. This includes activities such as harvesting operations, plantation establishment, road construction, quarry development, timber processing and forest restoration activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Code of Forest Practices will, therefore, become a key operational instrument, supporting the implementation of the Act. Unlike the existing Harvest Code of Practice, the new Code will address a much broader range of forestry activities, including native forest management, plantation management, biodiversity protection, restoration of degraded forest areas, stream and watershed protection, erosion control, environmental safeguards and wood processing operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another significant reform is the establishment of accredited forest practices offices. These offices will operate within both, the public and private sectors, and will be responsible for ensuring that forestry activities are properly planned, monitored and implemented in accordance with approved standards and legal requirements. This reform is particularly important because it strengthens operational accountability, while allowing the Ministry to focus more effectively on independent compliance monitoring and reporting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, the Act introduces stronger compliance and enforcement mechanisms, including stop-work notices, corrective action requirements, fixed penalties, prescribed fines and improved enforcement powers. These mechanisms are critical to ensuring that forestry operations are undertaken responsibly and sustainably.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the Act commenced in earnest during April of this year, under Phase 1 of the Ministry's implementation plan. I am pleased to inform this august House that the Ministry of Forestry has successfully completed the Forest Act Awareness Sessions across the Central, Eastern, Northern and Western Divisions during the month of April. These awareness programmes form the first major implementation milestone under Phase 1. The awareness sessions involved operational Forestry Officers, Technical Divisions, Corporate Support Teams, and forestry stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of these sessions was to ensure that all operational staff and sector participants develop a common understanding of the new legislative framework, implementation requirements, institutional responsibilities and anticipated operational challenges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these awareness sessions are critically important because the successful implementation of the Forest Act 2025 will depend heavily on institutional readiness and stakeholder understanding. Legislation alone cannot achieve reform unless those responsible for implementation clearly understand their roles and responsibilities under the new framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as implementation progresses into subsequent phases, the Ministry will continue to undertake technical training programmes, stakeholder consultations, institutional strengthening activities, compliance training, operational systems development, and sector-wide awareness programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an equally important component of the implementation will involve the preparation and rollout of supporting manuals, technical standards, operational procedures, and regulatory instruments that will strengthen the overall Forestry Sector. These include Forest Practices Operational Manuals, Compliance and Enforcement Guidelines, Plantation Management Standards, Harvesting and Environmental Protection Procedures, Monitoring and Reporting Systems, Restoration and Rehabilitation Guidelines, and Operational Codes for processing facilities and forestry infrastructure. These technical instruments will provide the practical guidance necessary for officers, operators, landowners and stakeholders, to effectively implement the provisions of the new legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Forest Act 2025 also strengthens Fiji's ability to engage in emerging opportunities within the global Forestry Sector. The legislation now enables the establishment of financing mechanisms and forest-based bio-economy initiatives, including payment of ecosystem services, carbon financing, biodiversity credits, restoration financing mechanisms and public-private forestry partnerships. This creates new opportunities for Fiji to strengthen sustainable forest financing, while also supporting climate change and conservation objectives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also recognised the central role of landowners within Fiji's Forestry Sector. The implementation framework, therefore, places a strong emphasis on improving landowner participation, strengthening benefit-sharing arrangements and creating opportunities for greater local involvement across forestry operations and downstream processing activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as implementation continues, the Ministry will also work closely with landowners, industry operators, development partners, academic institutions and civil society stakeholders to ensure that implementation remains practical, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while implementation of such a major legislative reform presents challenges, it also presents a significant opportunity to reposition Fiji's Forestry Sector towards a more sustainable, accountable, climate-resilient and economically productive future.

The Forest Act 2025, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not merely a legal reform - it represents a long-term national investment in the sustainable management of one of Fiji's most valuable natural resources. The Ministry remains fully committed to ensuring that implementation is carried out effectively and responsibly with the objective of strengthening governance, protecting our forest ecosystems, improving investor confidence, supporting landowner participation, and ensuring long-term sustainability for future generations of Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not least, I would like to thank and acknowledge the dedication, commitment and hard work of all staff of the Ministry of Forestry, our forestry stakeholders, development partners and technical experts who continue to contribute to this important national initiative. *Vinaka vakalevu*, and I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to speak.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for the update on the new Forestry Act 2025. It is very good to see, as she has highlighted, the scope of the coverage of the Act now which is much, much broader than it used to be under the old Act, which was mostly focused on extraction. She has highlighted to us that the implementation is going to be carried out in three phases, over two years. They are currently in the first phase, which commenced in April 2026, basically covering awareness sessions and trying to ensure that all the parties understand the legislation and that they are ready to do so.

She has also mentioned that they are now in the process of implementing manuals, SOPs, et cetera. I thought it would have been great if those were already developed to some extent, so that when they do the awareness, they are already talking about how it will be done, which I suppose will come around in the next level of awareness building.

There were a number of issues raised in the Ministry of Forestry 2020 to 2021 Annual Report which, hopefully, will be addressed to some degree by the implementation of this new Act. One of these was that there was only a 42 percent achievement on the forest financing targets, which is a very important part of sustainable forest management. Hopefully, when this comes into place, there will be more emphasis on that so that you can finance the establishment of a sustainable forest over time. I think that is one of the very important things for us.

I was glad to hear about the efforts being put into place by the landowners. Some of the landowners' traditional rights to forests have been around the issue of foraging, et cetera. A lot of things that we need to develop now is to ensure that landowners can fully benefit from the proceeds, the output and the GDP that comes out of the forest.

I am part of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. We have been going around talking about the Mahogany Bill 2025 and one of the things we have noticed, for instance, is the need to actually get them involved in harvesting and processing. At this moment, a lot of them get money out of stumpage and lease, but they need to be able to get more out of those places where the real money is.

I am looking forward to when you are talking about landowners who are involved, that it is not just their right to go into the forest and take the medicine and the leaves for those little things, but also to ensure that they can fully benefit from the kind of return that they can get from the forests.

We have noticed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we were in Dreketi that the landowners have started their company, which is a good sign. We noticed that some of them are using money from iTLTB and other sources, so they can get the full benefits from the trees that are planted by their fathers and grandfathers in the past.

One of the other things that I did not hear the honourable Minister speak about this when we are developing these policies, and I hope that the National Development Plan (NDP) and the indicators that you have in the current NDP are in sync with the kind of things that we are trying to get out of this legislation.

One of the things that is very important is once you have a legislation, you have a policy, you have goals, and you have very good indicators that match with what you are trying to achieve with this particular Act. This is a very good development for Fiji because once this is fully developed, landowners can make money from forests even without cutting trees, through REDD+, et cetera. I know it has happened already with pine where they extract the resin from the standing pine trees that can move on into extraction and harvesting. We look forward to the time when landowners themselves have companies that will be able to export the forest products and get the full benefit of the trees that they have planted.

We are very glad to see that there is now a broader focus, not just on the extraction of trees, but ensuring we have a sustainable forest. Forests are a huge carbon sink. They capture carbon from the air, so it is very important for us to ensure that replanting takes place so that we can have a more holistic view of everything to do with foresting.

I am also glad to see the new range of licensing that has been put in place in the legislation for different parts, not just for harvesting, but for other parts. It is very important for Government to be able to do that and manage it well.

The other good development now in this Act is that the implementation and enforcement is not just reliant on Ministry staff - it is a broader range and getting the community involved because we then see that forestry is a fundamental and a very important resource for our country, so we need to make sure that it stays there and that the benefits are shared equitably across all stakeholders. I wish the honourable Minister well in implementation.

Update on the Education Reforms

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament; Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to provide a brief update on the Education Reforms, that is, the:

- (1) National Research Council;
- (2) Fiji Education Commission;
- (3) review of the 2013 National Curriculum Framework; and
- (4) Higher Education Commission Vice-Chancellor's Forum 2026.

These, Sir, are various policies and initiatives that the Ministry of Education has been working on and established to support the Ministry's work and initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after Cabinet approval, the National Research Council was appointed to consolidate research needs across Government Ministries, cultivate a more research-oriented national culture, and position Fiji as a regional leader in knowledge creation.

The Ministry of Education has successfully convened the 2026 National Research Council, with interim Council Members being led by Professor Dhamendra Sharma, with distinguished members such as Professor Satish Chand, Dr. Penueli Emi, Professor Stephen Ratuva, Dr. Tarisi Vunidilo, Dr. Shobna Maharaj, Professor Bhibya Sharma, and Mr. Joeli Ditoka.

The first duty of the National Research Council, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to review the National Research Council Act 2017, to ensure better functionality and oversight, and to advise on the development of operational structures, systems and processes under the Interim Director's leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Research Council will foster research excellence within our universities. This partnership will enhance the global ranking of Fiji's universities, attract international research grants and build the capacity of local academics and postgraduate students.

Historically, Government Ministries for some time Mr. Speaker, Sir, have operated in silos, occasionally relying on *ad hoc* or external consultants to draft policies. The National Research Council is tasked to provide independent evidence-based advice to strengthen data-driven policymaking across Government Ministries. This means national policies on health, education, climate change and infrastructure will be backed by rigorous, locally contextualized scientific data, leading to better public spending and more effective laws.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the intention of the National Research Council is to also establish a national database for research reposition, and a competitive database of expert profiles for grant application reviewers through a transparent and competitive process.

With representatives from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and indigenous heritage experts, the National Research Council will ensure that traditional knowledge and cultural frameworks are treated as valid fundamental keys to sustainable development. This will also protect Fiji's intellectual property, ensuring that modernisation does not come at the cost of cultural expense.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Fiji Education Commission, I am pleased to provide an update to this august House on the historic work undertaken by the independent Fiji Education Commission which was established on 1st July, 2025, following Cabinet approval. This represents the first comprehensive review of Fiji's Education System since year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission's mandate includes a review of Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Education, teacher training institutions and technical and vocational training. I am pleased to report that the Commission is systematically moving forward, blending international policy standards and traditional Fijian values of 'Talanoa', to maintain cultural authenticity and stakeholders' inclusivity.

Mr. Speaker, the Commission conducted extensive consultations with Senior Officials and Directors across all key functional areas of the Ministry of Education. It has further engaged with vital sector partners and statutory bodies.

The Education Commission visited a number of schools around the country in the Northern, Eastern, Central and Western Divisions, encompassing Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centres, primary, secondary and special vocational institutions. Through these visits, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission has engaged directly with grassroots stakeholders, including students, classroom teachers, School Management Committees and parents. The Commission's ongoing work is deeply anchored in desk research, benchmarking against the Historic Education Commission Report of 2000, the 2023 Fiji National Education Summit, the Seven Thematic Areas of the Denarau Declaration 2024-2033 and the Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2029.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission is currently in a reflection and analysis phase, systematically reviewing all findings, school visitation observations, and research materials, to identify key themes, systematic patterns and strategic priorities that will inform evidence-based recommendations.

The Commission remains on track, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to deliver its final report to my office by the end of July this year, providing the Government and all stakeholders with evidence-based strategic recommendations for transforming Fiji's education sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the review of the 2013 National Curriculum Framework complementary to our broader legislative and structural reforms, I am proud to announce that the Ministry of Education has also officially launched the Comprehensive Review of the National Curriculum Framework. The existing framework was last reviewed in 2013, which was over a decade ago and is severely outdated.

The revised National Curriculum Framework will act as a modern bridge, fully aligned with the 2023 Denarau Declaration, the National Development Plan and Vision 2050 in the Pacific Regional Framework, as well as global benchmarks such as Sustainable Development Goals.

To ensure our curriculum addresses Fiji's 21st-century educational demands, I have appointed two exceptionally qualified local consultants to lead this review - Ms. Rokobua Naiyaga, a seasoned education leader with over 50 years of experience in sector governance and curriculum development, and Dr. Hem Dayal, a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of the South Pacific.

On 13th May, 2026, the Ministry successfully convened the Fiji National Curriculum Review Framework Inception Workshop to spearhead this process. The workshop was anchored on the theme, "Re-imagining Fiji's Curriculum for 2026 and Beyond", affirming the nation's educational initiative. The workshop aimed to bring together key stakeholders to initiate discussions, validate the scope and outline the roadmap of FNCF review.

Participants engaged in the thorough examination of the 2013 FNCF, identifying key challenges and gaps. This analysis provided a firm foundation for the comprehensive review of the 2013 FNCF and reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to ensuring that education policies remain effective, relevant and align with the needs of all learners.

What is highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the need to extend coverage to areas such as character building, values in education, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, leadership, resilience and life skills. This NCF Inception Workshop focused on critical curriculum transformations, include the following:

- Integrating TVET and entrepreneurship skills from ECE through to Year 13, creating a clear, flexible learning pathway.
- Preserving and teaching culture, traditional skills and indigenous languages at the lower primary level, alongside foreign languages in secondary schools.
- Promoting digital and information technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), and virtual simulations into everyday classroom pedagogy.
- Developing comprehensive bilingual resources and creating strong, unified support mechanisms across formal, informal and non-formal education sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon extensive consultations and analytical review of data collected, the final findings and the reviewed NCF document will be submitted for Cabinet endorsement in the near future.

On 8th May, 2026, the Higher Education Commission successfully relaunched the Vice-Chancellor's Forum 2026 at Novotel Suva in Lami, previously known as the Committee for the Accreditation of University Qualification.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the newly revived forum brought together Vice-Chancellors and senior leadership team from all five of Fiji's registered universities - the University of the South Pacific, Fiji National University, University of Fiji, the Pasifika Communities University and Fulton Adventist University.

The Vice-Chancellor's Forum, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been reconvened to re-establish a common platform for Vice-Chancellors to engage in meaningful dialogue, address shared academic challenges and develop strategies for sustainable and impactful higher education. In this Vice-Chancellor's Forum, I reminded our academic leaders that Fiji's universities do not operate in a vacuum and globally, higher education institutions face compounding pressures. They are simultaneously tasked with delivering world-class teaching and impactful research, while rapidly adjusting to volatile economic shifts and technological disruptions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Fiji to remain competitive on the global stage, our universities must deliver meaningful contributions to national development, and we can no longer afford fragmented progress or communication gaps between our top institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the meeting also highlighted the importance of aligning academic programmes with industry demands to better prepare graduates for employment, entrepreneurship and leadership roles within our communities. The Government remains committed to supporting institutions of higher learning as they continue to play a critical role in nation building, innovation and human capital development, and investment in education remains one of the most important pillars for sustainable economic growth and social progress.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend all Vice-Chancellors, university representatives and stakeholders for their valuable contributions and commitment towards strengthening higher education in Fiji and the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by bringing our five premier institutions back on the same table under this modernised format, we are ensuring that the next generation of Fijian graduates enter a workforce ready to lead, ready to adapt and succeed anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, this Government remains deeply committed to supporting our institutions of learning at every tier, from early childhood centres to our higher education universities. The concurrent implementation of the National Research Council (NRC), the Education Commission and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) Review and the Vice-Chancellor's Forum represent a synchronised, unprecedented effort to build a modernised, inclusive and future-focused education system. Investment in a responsive curriculum and evidence-based policy remains the single most vital pillar of Fiji's sustainable economic growth, social progress and human capital development.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Education Commissioners, our NCF consultants, Ministry Officials and all regional Vice-Chancellors and other stakeholders for their unyielding commitment to enriching the livelihoods of all Fijians.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I acknowledge the reforms in education, and I must say that reforms are necessary. Every Government has a duty to improve curriculum delivery, modernise systems, strengthen learning outcomes for our children and equip students with the modern skills needed for today's rapidly changing workforce.

I was very glad to hear about the establishment of the National Research Councils which, I believe, is very important for driving a nation's scientific and technological progress. I am also pleased to hear that the Fiji Education Commission is tasked with reviewing Fiji's education system.

However, no matter how many reforms are announced, those reforms will not succeed if foundational challenges facing our educators remained unresolved.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji continues to face a serious teacher shortage in certain subject areas. The Ministry itself has acknowledged difficulties in retaining teachers because many are leaving for better-paid opportunities overseas. Rural and remote schools are affected by staffing shortages continuing year after year. Some rural schools lack teachers for subjects such as physics and mathematics. This creates inequality in educational opportunities between the urban and rural students. A child's future should not depend on whether they live in Suva or in a remote maritime or interior community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another major concern is remuneration and incentives. Teachers continue to struggle with rising costs of living while salaries and incentives remain inadequate. Low pay affects morale, retention and the quality of education delivered in classrooms.

Furthermore, as I have said earlier on, teacher welfare is the foundational pillar of effective education reform. Teacher welfare reforms in countries, like Finland and Singapore, prove that sustainable improvements in student achievement only happen when teachers are supported, motivated and respected, and their pay is aligned with the cost of living.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, many schools still face ICT and resource challenges today. In some areas, teachers have limited access to computers, unreliable electricity, inadequate internet connectivity and insufficient ICT training. We cannot speak about modernising education while many classrooms still lack the basic tools necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reforms on paper will mean very little unless we first invest in the people who carry the education system every single day, and that is our teachers. If the Government truly wants meaningful reform, then priority must be given to improving teacher retention, increasing salaries and rural incentives for teachers, filling vacancies, strengthening teacher training and mentoring, ensuring schools are properly resourced in all areas, rural, remote, maritime areas and ensuring that allowances are paid in a timely manner.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Very poor!

HON. H. CHAND.- There are a lot of teachers this year, and last year, allowances were not paid on time, so we have to make sure that allowances are paid on time if we want to provide quality education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, note that Oral Question Nos. 3/2026 and 31/2026 have been dropped from the Order Paper as these have been addressed by the Ministerial Statement delivered by the honourable Minister of Finance this morning. The remaining three questions this morning, the Secretariat will peruse them after looking at the uncorrected version later today, and he will be advised tomorrow of the decisions.

ADB's Financing Facility - PHIT Project
(Question No. 17/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister of Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on the Asian Development Bank's financing facility under the Pacific Health Islands Transformation project?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Member for the question. The Government signed the USD50 million equivalent to FJD111.2 million loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the Pacific Healthy Island Transformation (PHIT) Project in April this year. The PHIT is a regional health project initiated by the Government of Fiji with joint financing by development partners to the tune of USD239.5 million in loan and grant financing. This is around FJD582 million.

A total of USD181.9 million, around FJD404.6 million, will be provided to Fiji towards the project, of which the World Bank will finance USD93.5 million, USD50 million from ADB, USD30 million from OPEC Fund and USD8.4 million from the Pandemic Fund. All these loan fundings are concessional in nature. The remaining allocation of approximately USD58 million will be provided to other regional countries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the PHIT Project will support the transformation of the Pacific health system into fit-for-purpose primary healthcare, oriental health system that promotes health and delivers adequate preventative and curative services in the region through impacts on scale and greater efficiencies. The objective of the PHIT Project is to increase access to quality health services within participating Pacific Island Countries which include Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati and Tuvalu, with a focus on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) management.

The Project is expected to strengthen the regional system, to improve access to quality care, and essential input for greater resilience of participating Pacific Island Countries. It is expected to modernise Fiji's health system, with emphasis on establishing networks of care for health promotion, early detection, and management of diseases, including the construction of a new Radiotherapy Unit. It will strengthen stewardship, evidence-based decision-making, and regional learning for a quality health system in Pacific Island Countries.

As part of the project, we will construct and operate our first Radiotherapy Centre in Suva, which will provide radiation therapy to treat cancer. We will also rehabilitate some of the buildings at the CWM Hospital with modular technology to provide additional beds and better services. Telemedicine will be adopted in major health centres to improve service delivery, while we will also undertake major investments in skills development for the overall health centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the project, 17 primary healthcare facilities across the four Divisions will be upgraded to provide climate-resilient and digitally enabled essential care, telehealth access, and integrated support across rural, urban and maritime communities. These Centres include Naililili in Rewa, Bua, Tukavesi in Cakaudrove, Vunitogoloa in Ra, Nuku-i-Lau in Navosa, Balevuto in Ba, Nasele in Kadavu, Vacalea and Kavala in Kadavu, Kabara in Lau, Valelevu, Raiwaqa, Nakasi, Lami, Nausori, and Kamikamica Health Facility in Lautoka, benefiting over 275,000 people.

This is a significant investment by the Government to improve our health system and will complement the work led by the Australian Government on the CWM Hospital master planning and relocation. In addition, the Government has identified Valelevu Ground as the new site for the hospital and following the master planning exercise, the Government will work with development partners on financing the new hospital.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister launched the PHIT regional project on Thursday, 23rd April, with the support of other participating regional countries and development

partners. We are now working on the procurement of technical activities for civil works, the recruitment of the relevant consultancies and following this, the implementation will begin.

The Ministry of Finance will be the leading implementation agency in a strong partnership with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The PHIT Project will be implemented for a five-year term until August 2031. Currently, a Governance and Regional Steering Committee has been established, with the South Pacific Commission as the Secretariat. This is to provide an implementation plan and also provide the highest regional governance and oversight.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, from the amounts that you mentioned, the question is twofold. Is that the total amount dedicated to the Pacific, or is that Fiji's portion? Which portion or how much of it is a grant and how much of it is a loan facility?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- The \$239.5 million is the total for the Pacific Island, that is in US dollars and for Fiji, it's \$181.9 million, and all those are all on loan funding on concessional terms.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I do appreciate this particular project because the health system needs to be upgraded. We often see that in projects, the majority of the money is wasted or used up in consultancy services, and very little is left to really carry out the work. How will you make sure that this does not happen for this project?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- With the support of the ADB and the World Bank Team, they will be supervising the project together with the Governance Steering Committee, as I had mentioned before, comprising Pacific Island member countries as well as our multilateral partners and the South Pacific Commission which is the secretariat, who will be assisting and monitoring the implementation.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, we are coming towards the end of the financial year, so is this amount going to be in next year's Budget or for the current financial year? You also indicated this morning that our debt stands at around \$11 billion or something, as of today, so where will this be a part of, in terms of our budget?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- It will be part of the next financial year.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will now move on, but before I do, I would like to remind the honourable Minister that whilst Kabara owes its allegiance to the Turaga Tui Nayau and Tui Lau, it is quite independent from Lakeba. Thank you.

National Disaster Risk Financing Policy 2026-2031
(Question No. 30/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on the National Disaster Risk Financing Policy of 2026-2031?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The Pacific region is at the forefront of climate change emergencies. Fiji's vulnerability to climate change increases the magnitude of fiscal risk consequences as well. Events such as *Tropical Cyclone Winston* as an example, caused a huge loss to Fiji's GDP. Therefore, this National Disaster Risk Reduction remains one of the top priorities for Fiji and must be mainstreamed into all aspects of policy planning and implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government commenced the development of the National Disaster Risk Financing Policy (NDRFP) 2026-2031 in 2024, led by the Strategic Planning Office, which was previously under the Ministry of Finance, and received technical assistance from both the World Bank, under the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative, and the Asian Development Bank. The preparation of the policy has been an active and consultative process, building on the outcomes of the National Disaster Risk Financing Workshop held in October 2024.

The Disaster Risk Financing National Steering Committee was also established, which comprised of key ministries, the private sector, and civil society organisations. The policy has been developed with a focus to strengthen financial resilience to disasters and will serve as a blueprint for disaster risk financing priorities and mechanisms. The policy is aligned with the National Development Plan and Vision 2050. It also aligns with the National Climate Change Policy 2018-2030, the National Climate Finance Strategy, the National Disaster Risk Reduction 2018-2030, and the Financial Management Act of 2024. It further aligns with the regional and global frameworks such as the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Cabinet approved the policy back in March 2026 and is one of the policy reform actions for 2025-2026 under the budget support programme on Sustainable and Resilient Growth Reform Programme, which has been successfully achieved with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of the policy is to set out the Government's overall approach to managing the financial impact of climate and geophysical related hazard events and to identify areas to strengthen the enabling environment called Disaster Risk Financing (DRF). The policy provides direction for existing and future Disaster Risk Financing (DRF) instruments, which will be used in a coordinated, timely, and cost-effective manner to support response to recovery from those events.

The policy builds on the Disaster Risk Financing Framework 2025 and other enabling legislation and policies, translating them into clear policy direction to guide consistent decision-making, promote fiscal discipline, and ensure that resources are used efficiently and transparently.

The scope of the policy extends to all ministries and agencies that have a role in financing response and recovery. The policy also provides directions to financial institutions, development partners and other stakeholders. The policy also provides directions to financial institutions, development partners and other stakeholders whose financial support is integral to disaster response and recovery. The policy applies for a five-year period between 2026 and 2031. A review of the policy to reflect the lessons learned, evolving risk, progress achieved will be undertaken post-2030.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the policy outlines the strategic priorities of Government regarding fiscal risk from disasters. It also acts as a reference document for relevant stakeholders in understanding how to manage such risk and the use of financial instruments that the country will employ to face them and to reduce the economic and fiscal impact of disasters by combining instruments which cover different identified risks and ultimately enhance the sustainability of public finance for disaster risk management in Fiji.

The policy is to strengthen Fiji's financial resilience to disasters by ensuring that sufficient, timely and cost-effective resources are available to respond to and recover from climate and geophysical related hazards, protect fiscal stability and safeguard development spending and promote equitable recovery. Achieving this will require clear direction for the design, use, and

coordination of disaster risk financing instruments and integrate disaster risk financing into Fiji's public financial management system.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- The policy provides a framework to better manage the fiscal impact of disasters by improving coordination and those of disaster risk financing instruments. What is the implementation plan for the policy?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Finance will provide the overall leadership and also coordinate closely with the National Disaster Risk Management Office under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime and Disaster Management, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, and other key agencies and ministries in development of the implementation plan. Each institution will play an important role in that regard, and implementation will be progressively rolled out over the policy period and will be fully integrated into Fiji's national system to ensure that the policy becomes an integral part of our development planning and financial management, rather than a standalone initiative.

Capacity development is important, not only with the Ministry of Finance, but with all the other ministries, to ensure that strengthening institutional and technical expertise in financial risk analysis, financial management and monitoring and evaluation as well within the Ministry of Finance and the key ministries. Our development partners are assisting us in that regard, including the facilitating of the reforms, and the implementation plan is scheduled to be completed within this month, May 2026.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the insurance penetration rate in Fiji is around 12 percent and a vast majority of households and businesses are not covered for disaster risk. So, because they are not covered, and when the disaster strikes, they are dependent on Government for assistance. Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament whether the National Disaster Risk Financing Policy includes targets to improve insurance penetration and what are the plans to achieve that?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently we have targeted insurance for vulnerable sectors or vulnerable communities. In the future, the government as well as key institutions such as FNPF will look into other kinds of products that can cater for our communities and businesses as well.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment what we have is parametric insurance and this is very low volume, but we are talking about big businesses and households, flood, et cetera, is not covered by insurance companies. I do believe that we need to look at some mechanisms to address this particular issue, but I am a little worried about involving FNPF in this area. I think more discussion needs to be undertaken with World Bank because this is a very pertinent issue for the nation, and if this particular subject matter is not well addressed through your policy, then it will become a problem. My question is, which you did not answer, whether insurance penetration is a target in your policy?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Definitely, yes. As I mentioned before, at different levels. We have covered at micro level. At the higher level, regional level, we have the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company (PCRIC) which covers insurance at regional level. As you rightly mentioned, FNPF is targeted at their members and there is still a gap for those in between.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- The question to the honourable Minister is, can he clearly explain how does the policy specifically protect smallholder farmers, sugarcane farmers, fishermen and even market vendors, in times of cyclones and just unprecedented rain? I think in Nausori we saw last two months ago, vegetables were floating away. Those videos came out on social media. So, what is the

protection towards farmers and fishermen with this new framework?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned before, currently, there are some insurances where that is provided, I am not sure whether those ones cover parametric insurance including sugarcane farmers. I am not sure whether those farmers too can be covered. They can be covered if they can collectively form an association or cooperative such as those. The policy, once implemented, can go and look into those micro-levels.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, the big question here is in the last biggest natural disaster that we had, it cost us about US\$1.38 million, and that was *TC Winston*. That was about 20 percent to 30 percent of our GDP. In terms of the added expenditures that we have in the current times, how do you propose to reduce the long-term fiscal risk? For example, is there going to be a permanent tax, I do not know what the actual policy is. How do you propose to reduce the long-term fiscal risk bearing in mind that this is a problem that we have to face every year, especially with that particular example?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Currently, as I briefly mentioned, we have a peak week that covers national risk, even though it has not yet covered the calamities that we want, but we will go in stages. At present, we are not covering the full coverage that we need. However, as you have probably seen, two months ago, or one month ago, we received a claim back from PIRG on the flood that happened around the country. What we will do is try to uplift the coverage and, apart from the amount, also improve the type of cover that we have.

GP PPP Scheme and Lab PPP Scheme
(Question No. 52/2026)

HON. F.S. KOYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister of Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on why all those engaged under the GP PPP Scheme and Laboratory PPP Scheme have not been regularly paid since October 2025?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL- Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently, we have around 52 approved General Practitioners for dental practitioners and 20 medical laboratories serving Fiji citizens across the country. A total of 162,000 are currently registered under the scheme, with over 638,000 patient visits, costing Government around \$33.2 million so far. Before I dive into the realities of the payment, I would like to highlight to the honourable Member that this scheme was managed by the Ministry of Finance. However, after the reassignment of the Ministerial portfolio in 2025, the Scheme is now being managed by the Ministry of Strategic Planning. Subsequently, the payments have also been facilitated by the Ministry of Strategic Planning since 6th February, 2026.

On the payment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, note that under Scheme 3, separate payments are processed for service providers, as I had mentioned before - general practitioners, medical laboratories, and dental services. An update on the payment as of today, medical laboratories, and dental payments have been paid until week 187, which is until 22nd March, 2026. For the general practitioners, payments have been paid up to week 233, which is until 15th February, 2026. To date, payments to general practitioners amount to around \$25.9 million for more than 556,000 patients. Dental practitioners spent around \$2 million on around 25,000 patient visits, and medical laboratories around \$5.4 million for 57,000 patient visits.

The Ministry acknowledges that the payments have been delayed. However, these delays are not due to a lack of commitment by the Government to honour its financial obligations. Rather, they are a

result of anomalies and lack of due diligence from some service providers themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to detail the payment process. After a patient is seen at an approved clinic, the GPs, DPs, and the medical laboratories submit their weekly claims to Fiji Care Insurance Limited through the online portal, which records the following details - patient's number; identification card; patient's residential address; patient's contact number; itemized breakdown of service provided, such as consultations, injections, or laboratory tests; and signatures of both the patient and the service provider.

After downloading the weekly data, FijiCare verifies and cleanses the information – a process that usually takes one week – before forwarding it to the Ministry for payment. The Ministry team, which consists of analysts and verification officers, then conducts a thorough verification of the claims, which takes two weeks, as each patient includes approximately 64 invoices covering around 2,000 payments. Upon completion of the detailed assessment, an anomalies report is prepared and sent to FijiCare Insurance to liaise with the respective service providers for clarification, service providers generally take another week to respond. However, in some cases, responses are not received at all.

Once the anomaly responses are received, the team compiles the request for payment, along with the necessary documents for payment. After approval, the payment request is forwarded to the finance unit for payment processing. In summary, provided that all parties perform their roles efficiently, the full payment cycle for a single week's claim typically takes approximately 30 working days to complete, if all the documents are in order.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason for the delay in payment is due to the anomalies or irregularities, which may indicate discrepancies, errors, or potential non-compliance within the financial documentation and processes. I would like to inform this august House on the examples of anomalies that the verification team identifies on a weekly basis. These include, but is not limited to:

- (1) Approximately 20 percent to 25 percent of invoices returned each week due to inaccuracies in the stated figures. These errors require correction before invoices can be processed, leading to delays and additional administrative workload.
- (2) Expired annual practicing license for practicing doctors at approved Government GP clinics.
- (3) Service providers in breach of the terms of Service Agreement. Billing for services not included in the Service Agreement.
- (4) Instances have been identified where clinics have been billed for both a consultation and a review for the same patient on the same day. This practice is non-compliant with the Service Agreement and constitutes unethical billing. What I can say is, unethical billing is happening.
- (5) Claims have been submitted for consultation charges on days where patients were scheduled specifically for pre-arranged service, such as an ultrasound scan. To establish precedent, a separate consultation fee is not claimable for re-scheduled service appointment.
- (6) GPs with multiple ECG charges being submitted for claims. Nearly all patient clinics have been billed for ECG charges – another unethical billing.
- (7) It has also been noted that patients who are visiting clinics on a particular date for example, an ultrasound scan, are being charged with a consultation fee.
- (8) Clinics are also charging for dressing costs under administration of injections to clinics and not for ultrasound. However, as per certain claims, these patients have not been administered injections – unethical billing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the Ministry's due diligence and accountability procedures, all claims under the scheme undergo a thorough verification process to ensure that only legitimate and accurate claims are paid. Typically, it takes around 10 days to 14 days to complete the verification and payment process when claims are free of discrepancy. However, when anomalies are detected, processing may take longer, particularly when practitioners do not respond promptly to clarification requests. However, when anomalies are detected, processing may take longer, particularly when practitioners do not respond promptly to the clarification request.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government remains fully committed to ensure that all eligible Fijians continue to have access to quality and timely primary healthcare services, through the PPP-free medical scheme. The Ministry also acknowledges and appreciates the continued partnership and cooperation of all participating practitioners, in maintaining transparency and accountability within the scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is currently reviewing the scheme to ensure its long-term sustainability, including consideration of restructuring options and the possible integration of its functions within the Ministry of Health, to improve efficiency and service delivery.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- So, effectively honourable Minister, I gather from your answer that those containing anomalies take a while to get sorted out, obviously. What portion of the answer is where those that do not have any anomalies, how much of that has already been cleared or is there still a backlog? You do acknowledge that there is a backlog, those that have ticked all the boxes, what portion is still left to be paid in terms of those that have already been agreed to?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- I apologise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have the exact figure for that, but it can be provided.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is about the delays. It has been noted and even a statement was issued by the Ministry of Health that some of these GPs or service providers under this scheme, they turn away patients because they are not paid, so patients are turned away because the GPs are not paid. In the scheme, what can be done in such cases, so that patient services continue?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- It is just a matter of consulting the right person, whether it is in the Ministry or the Ministry of Finance can resolve those that do not have anomalies, or even the GPs to contact officers. There should not be any problem. The GP should continue if there are no anomalies with him or his operation.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Sir. It is easier said than done. If that was the case, then the Ministry of Health would not be issuing a statement. It is a serious matter, and I think when you are reviewing your GP scheme, this particular issue must be addressed, because when this scheme was made, it was made purely for providing services to the vulnerable community.

Millenium Challenge Co-operation - Fiji and USA
(Question No. 64/2026)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Service, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, and Youth and Sports update Parliament

on the Millennium Challenge Co-operation recently signed between Fiji and the United States of America?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question from the honourable Leader of the Opposition. I thank honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament for your presence this morning. I reiterate, Sir, a congratulatory note I sent to the honourable Minister for Education, congratulating him and his family for his son being included in the Japanese Rugby Team preparing for the World Cup.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to clarify that the Agreement that recently signed (quite a thick document) between the Government of the United States of America, through the Millennium Challenge Co-operation (MCC), which is the Compact Development Funding Agreement. It is the funding agreement for the development of our main submission. This is not the final compact agreement itself, but rather the important preparatory arrangement that supports the development, the analysis and design of potential MCC compact programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will recall that one very serious announcement made by the President of America of goods coming to America affected Fiji pretty badly. We had panic from some of our suppliers, and in response to that, the Secretary of State of the United States of America called me to say that this thing that has been developed, Fiji is not to panic because they would still be in a position to assist us in our development, our answers, and in our efforts to comply with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Mis an independent agency of the United States of America Government that partners with countries demonstrating commitment to good governance, economic freedom, institutional accountability, and investment in their people. Fiji's eligibility to develop an MCC Compact that was announced in August 2025 represents an important milestone in the Fiji-United States relations and reflects growing confidence in Fiji's governance reforms, economic direction and development partnership agenda. This engagement is fully aligned with the Government's overarching development priorities of strengthening economic resilience, improving national infrastructure, promoting private sector-led growth, creating employment opportunities, enhancing trade competitiveness, and improving the overall ease of doing business in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this initiative is closely aligned to the Coalition Government's broader economic transformation agenda of lifting Fiji's long-term growth trajectory from the historical average of approximately 3.5 percent to 6.5 percent of annual growth, as part of our pathway towards achieving high-income country status by 2050. This relates to a question that I had asked honourable Premila Kumar, giving us time to amend the response in a written response that she requested.

Achieving that ambition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will require sustained structural reforms across key sectors of the economy, particularly in areas that directly influence productivity - those that affect competitiveness, those that affect investment confidence, logistical efficiency, and private sector expansion. The MCC process provides Fiji with an important platform to undertake targeted and evidence-based reforms that will strengthen the enabling environment for growth and allow Fiji to remain on a credible and sustainable path towards its long-term national development objectives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this cooperation is also consistent with Fiji's foreign policy approach of maintaining constructive and respectful partnerships with all countries, based on mutual respect, sovereignty, shared prosperity, and development cooperation. Fiji remains committed to engaging with international partners in ways that support our national interests, regional responsibilities, and long-term development aspirations.

Cabinet endorsed the Compact Development Funding Agreement in February 2026 and approved that the honourable Minister of Finance, Commerce and Business Development execute the agreement and any related documentation on terms and conditions cleared by the Office of the Solicitor-General. The Agreement was subsequently signed on 28th February, 2026, between the Government, through the Ministry of Finance, and MCC, through the US Deputy Secretary of State, Christopher Landau. The Agreement provides up to USD12 million in grant funding to support the development and preparation of a potential compact programme.

I wish to emphasise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this is grant funding, not a loan facility. Therefore, it does not add to Government debt exposure. The funding will support technical analysis, stakeholder consultations, feasibility assessments, sector studies and the establishment of a dedicated compact development team to work collaboratively with MCC and relevant national stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the completion of the initial scoping and consultation phase, the Coalition Government has confirmed that the next stage of the compact development process will focus on two strategic areas - ports and business regulating environments. These sectors are central to Fiji's long-term economic transformation agenda and is closely aligned with the National Development Plan and Government's broader economic reform priorities.

Our mission is to position Fiji as a more competitive, efficient, and investment-ready economy within the Pacific region. Improving port efficiency and maritime logistics is critical to strengthening Fiji's position as a regional transport, trade and logistics hub. It directly affects the cost of doing business, export competitiveness, supply chain reliability, shipping efficiency, tourism connectivity and investor confidence.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, efficient ports and modern logistics systems are essential enablers of higher economic growth. For a geographically dispersed island economy like Fiji, reducing logistics costs, improving cargo turnaround times, and strengthening connectivity across domestic and international supply chains are fundamental to increasing productivity, expanding trade and supporting private sector-led economic activities. These reforms are, therefore, integral to Government's objective of accelerating long-term growth towards the 6 percent target required to achieve high-income status by 2050.

Similar reforms to the business regulatory environment are essential to reducing administrative bottlenecks, improving transparency and consistency across Government processes, supporting local enterprise development, and attracting quality domestic foreign investment. The Government recognises that sustained economic growth cannot be achieved through public expenditure alone. It requires a strong and confident private sector, supported by modern, efficient and predictable regulatory systems that encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and investment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MCC reform process complements Government's ongoing efforts to modernise regulatory frameworks, improve investor confidence, strengthen institutional coordination, and create a more competitive business environment that supports economic expansion and job creation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MCC compact development process is evidence-based and reform-oriented. It is not simply about identifying projects for financing, rather it seeks to identify the underlying structure of constraints affecting economic growth and develop targeted, practical and sustainable solutions that can deliver long-term national balance.

As part of the current phase, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MCC and the Ministry of Finance are

jointly undertaking a comprehensive root cause analysis to better understand the underlying challenges affecting port performance and the business operating environment in Beijing.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Prime Minister, after reading through your contribution in the debate on His Excellency's Opening Address this year, I was interested in what you stated about megaprojects and transformative investments. You have alluded to the bodies. Is there any other additional to these two specific areas that you mentioned in your 9th March Statement - transformative investments and mega projects that will be covered under the MCC.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, it is correct. You will probably remember that the previous government had - I do not know whether it was presented as an official document or intention, but word of a big trans-island highway that was going to be from the Western side to the Eastern side of Viti Levu. Those are the sort of big projects that we are looking at.

It will also involve faster routes from the Nausori Airport, developing Nausori Airport, having a big convention centre in Suva and all those things that are, perhaps, like dreams at the moment. They are part of our development goals for this millennium. It is part of rolling Fiji so that we are on par with development in other countries of the world. We are right into it. At this stage, this \$12 million is just to look at how and what we would like to develop.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Prime Minister, does the MCC our trade network currently exists, I think, it is TIFA that was signed in 2020 but previously under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) Programme, we were allowed duty-free entry for some goods. Does the MCC perceive or is looking at some future free trade agreements that may be done so that we improve our business environment, especially because we are in the throes of trying to diversify and do a whole lot more, and our classic examples are our kava and turmeric, et cetera, that are entering into the United States and they fetch a lot of money? Is that going to be a part of the MCC discussions and also the funding that is going to be received for all that, Sir?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the name itself – MCC. The corporation is set up in America to make us more competitive in whatever area that we are looking at as we move towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals that have been set for us. If they are going to be raising tariffs, how do we, in Fiji, as producers and suppliers of those cater for the intended or the projected increase? How do we make it more costly for Fiji and competitive for Fiji? That is how we compete with the tariffs that other countries may place on our supplies.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank all of you for your attention and contribution this morning. We will now suspend our proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.38 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed from where we left off this morning, I have the pleasure to extend, on all your behalf, a warm welcome to the delegation from the Pasifika Communities University who are here with us today, comprising of staff and students, led by my old boss - Pro-Chancellor, Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate.

On behalf of Parliament, we thank you for your visit, and trust that your time in the House will both be informative and enriching. Welcome to your Parliament once more.

QUESTIONS

Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Mutual Defence Treaty (Question No.65/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade update Parliament on the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Mutual Defence Treaty?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, it is important to place the discussion within the broader strategic environment in which Fiji and the wider Pacific now operate. We are living in an increasingly uncertain global environment, marked by conflicts abroad, geopolitical tensions, disruptions to supply chains and growing economic uncertainty. The developments are not distant events occurring somewhere else in the world. We have seen how events, far from shores, can affect fuel supplies, shipping routes, commodity prices and, ultimately, the everyday lives of our own people here in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recent developments affecting global shipping and energy supply chains have, again, reminded us that the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as Fiji, remain highly exposed to external shocks beyond our control. Such events reinforce the importance of building resilience and ensuring that Fiji is prepared, connected and able to respond effectively when global circumstances shift.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is within this context that Fiji continues to pursue a forward-looking and principled foreign policy grounded in our national interests and aligned with Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and our Collective Vision of an Ocean of Peace.

The Vuvale Union represents a significant elevation of the longstanding relationship between Fiji and Australia. It is not an *ad hoc* arrangement, but rather a structured and strategic framework reflecting the depth of trust, shared values and interconnected interests between our two countries.

Australia remains one of Fiji's most important economic development, trade and security partners. The Vuvale Union builds on this foundation and moves our relationship into a more integrated and future-focused partnership, designed to deliver practical outcomes for our people. Let me also state clearly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that partnership does not mean dependency, and cooperation does not mean surrendering sovereignty.

Fiji remains fully independent in its decision-making, and will continue to pursue a Foreign Policy grounded, first and foremost, in Fiji's national interests and guided by the principles of partnership, integration and regionalism. The Vuvale Union is designed, not only to strengthen bilateral relations, but also to contribute to wider Pacific solidarity and unity by operationalising the principles of the ocean of peace into practical areas of cooperation.

The scope of the Vuvale Union reflects a modern understanding of security consistent with the *Boe Declaration*, and security today extends beyond traditional defense considerations and includes economic security, human security, environmental security and digital security. It addresses emerging and contemporary challenges including, transnational organised crime, cyber threats, illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, health security concerns and climate change, which remain the single greatest existential threat to our region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the economic front, the Union seeks to strengthen trade, investment, infrastructure development, workforce mobility and broader economic integration, consistent with Fiji's development aspirations and long-term goals for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Negotiations on the Vuvale Union have been undertaken through a comprehensive whole of government approach, led at Senior Official level by the Office of the Prime Minister, with participation from 12 Ministries and Agencies. Discussions commenced in late 2025 and have progressed efficiently with regular updates provided to Cabinet. Following the conclusion of technical negotiations, the matter is now under final political consideration, and we look forward to formal endorsement and subsequent signing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sector-level engagements between line Ministries and their Australian counterparts are already progressing, reflecting a shift from discussion towards practical implementation.

In relation to the Ocean of Peace Mutual Defence Treaty, it should not be viewed through the traditional lens of Military alliances, as seen elsewhere around the world. It is not intended to militarize our region, rather it reflects Pacific priorities and Pacific realities. It builds on decades of cooperation between Fiji and Australia in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, disaster response, maritime security, and regional stability initiatives. The Treaty, therefore, complements the broader architecture of cooperation already being developed with the Vuvale Union, and supports our shared objective of preserving a peaceful, stable and secure Pacific region.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Treaty represent a strategic investment in Fiji's future. It is about ensuring that future generations inherit a Fiji that is secure, economically resilient and connected to trusted partners, and able to shape its own destiny rather than merely react to events beyond its shores. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Given the significant investment Australia has already done, could the honourable Minister elaborate on the strategic consideration and mutual priorities that underpin Australia's continued support for Fiji's bilateral security and development initiatives?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Australia's continued support for Fiji is not based simply on aid or development consideration, it reflects recognition that Fiji occupies a central role within our Blue Pacific region. Fiji serves as a diplomatic transport, economic and security hub. Stability in Fiji contributes directly to stability across the wider Pacific. Australia recognises that investing in Fiji strengthens the wider region itself.

Our bilateral partners maintain an active presence across our shared Blue Pacific region. The

Vuvale Partnership acknowledges Fiji's natural role within that regional architecture. This collaboration extends well beyond defence cooperation. It is fundamentally about strengthening societal resilience in a comprehensive and sustainable manner.

Australia's investments in education, healthcare, trade connectivity, maritime infrastructure and broader development programmes create benefits that extend, not only to Fiji, but also to our Pacific neighbours. It is not a one-way arrangement, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Fiji contributes leadership, regional influence and trusted partnerships, while Australia contributes resources, technical support and long-term cooperation. Together, these positions Fiji to support and lead regional development, while improving the lives of our people.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The honourable Minister mentioned about human security as well as ensuring that the Pacific is a peaceful place. Based on that, my question to the honourable Minister is; does the Treaty obligate Fiji to respond militarily if Australia is attacked?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- The policy of being friends to all and enemies to none remain unchanged, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Friendship with one country does not require hostility towards another. Fiji has always maintained a sovereign relationship based on our national interests, and we will continue to do so. The Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union does not bring an end to our longstanding sovereign Foreign Policy, rather it strengthens our capacity to exercise that sovereignty.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, my question is twofold. This is just about pretty much almost a formal treaty, the union. Is it being looked at in terms of it eventually becoming a formal treaty with Australia? I know it is a longstanding arrangement that we have with Australia and our neighbours, and both sides have done well. Will it eventually become a treaty? Secondly, will the treaty have any implications on our non-aligned status with all our other partners around the world?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I believe I have partially answered that question earlier. The non-aligned position that Fiji holds will not be affected by any such agreements that we do agree on. I believe that the treaty is what we are heading towards, and that is the main aim of this whole exercise.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, you have talked about the broader strategic environment, geopolitics, and one word that captured my attention was 'trusted partnership'. What do you make of the recent visit by President Trump to China? How does this align with the geopolitics and our priorities, given what we went through in the past when our trusted partner aborted us?

MR. SPEAKER.- Do you wish to answer that?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the affairs of other nations are not ours, so we will let them deal with their own affairs and we will deal with our own.

Labour Management Consultation and Cooperation Committees
(Question No. 66/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister update Parliament whether there are plans for the establishment of the Labour Management Consultation and Cooperation Committee (LMCCC), for the employees with over 20 workers, to boost productivity?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I thank the honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Labour Management Consultation and Cooperation Committee (LMCCC) was established under the Employment Relations Regulations 2008. Its establishment is required for every employer, employing 20 or more workers, which applies across all workplaces, including private sector enterprises, Government Ministries and Departments, statutory bodies and local authorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the LMCCC is a workplace-based mechanism designed to promote productivity, improve good faith dialogue and sound employment practices. It provides a formal platform where employers and workers can openly discuss workplace matters before they escalate into disputes, review workplace practices and productivity performance, and encourage innovation, skills development and continuous improvement within organisations.

The regulations require each Committee to consist of equal representation from management and workers, and representation across occupational groups, including gender and persons with disabilities where present. Employers are also required to register their committee with the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an average of 33 employers have been registered annually and have undergone specialised training since inception in 2008. The LMCCC plays a significant role in improving workplace productivity and strengthening labour-management relations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through regular consultation and cooperation, these Committees:

- (1) improve communication and information sharing between management and workers;
- (2) dissolve workplace concerns early before they disrupt operations;
- (3) involve workers in decision-making and workplace improvement initiatives;
- (4) encourage suggestions to reduce waste and improve efficiency;
- (5) promote training, innovation and people-management capabilities;
- (6) strengthen occupational health and safety consultation; and
- (7) reduce conflict, absenteeism and workplace grievances through constructive engagement.

The regulations specifically provide that LMCCCs are intended to assist employers in reviewing and developing workplace practices that promote good faith, employment relations and increase productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last five years, a total of 165 productivity tools trainings were conducted at workplaces, and the National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC), as the implementing arm of the Ministry in terms of productivity promotion, is also responsible for conducting productivity training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, LMCCCs remain one of Fiji's key labour market institutions, supporting enterprise-level productivity improvement, workplace consultation and cooperation, and the implementation of the National Productivity Agenda. This is also aligned with the Fiji National Productivity Master Plan and international best practices promoted through the Asian Productivity Organization (APO).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reports submitted by the Committees demonstrate practical improvements achieved at workplace level. These include reviewing absenteeism trends, identifying operational bottlenecks, introducing workplace-driven process improvements, implementing training programmes, addressing occupational health and safety concerns, monitoring productivity indicators and recommending incentive-based initiatives. The collaborative approach strengthens trust between workers and management, while improving organizational efficiency and performance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the strengthening and sustaining of productivity movement in Fiji, the Ministry has commenced the appointment of productivity champions within established LMCCC committees. These champions will serve as focal points within their organizations to drive continuous improvement initiatives, promote good-faith employment practices, and support process improvement and committee audit functions to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, LMCCC remains a cornerstone of Fiji's approach towards collaborative, productive and harmonious workplace relations. Through stronger compliance, ongoing capacity building and active engagement, adoption of modern productivity tools and methodologies, and the introduction of productivity champions and the recognition of programmes, LMCCC will continue to play an important role in advancing productivity, growth, decent work and sustainable economic development for all Fijians.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for that intensive answer. A lengthy six-minute answer means that it is something very important for the workers, the employers, as well as for the Ministry.

My question to the honourable Minister is, if LMCCC is so important for the employees, workers, as well as the Ministry and for the productivity at the workplace, why has he and his Ministry removed LMCCC from the Bill that is before the Committee? It no longer appears in the Bill. It has been removed, so if it is so important, why did the Ministry opt to remove it from the Bill?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- It has been included and it is there, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his reply to the question. The LMCCC is, indeed, a mechanism by which you can go to decent work and the enhancement of productivity. There are a lot of complaints by employers that it is non-existent in a lot of workplaces. I am just wondering whether the honourable Minister might be able to tell us about the percentage of workplaces that have more than 20 people that have these LMCCs operational, and whether they have any studies on their impact on productivity and their impact also on reducing tension between management and workers?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are figures that NTPC has in its possession because they are the agency that carries out this activity and I will get those figures for the honourable Member before the end of this session.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament is a place where we need to be honest and because I am part of the Committee, I can confirm that LMCCC was taken off, and it was not in the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Is that a question, honourable Kumar?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The Information was not correct.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will let the Minister answer. Do you wish to respond to the statement?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I repeat that it is now there in the Bill.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, as rightfully said, you sang the praises of this LMCCC. My question is simply, what division of your Ministry has been doing this particular monitoring to tell us whether it is good or bad, and it would have been one of the reasons why you removed it?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- The Division that looks after it is the Productivity Division, Sir.

Direct Air Connectivity - Fiji and European Markets
(Question No. 67/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on how the Ministry intends to improve direct air connectivity between Fiji and European markets following Fiji's participation at ITB Berlin 2026?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.— Mr. Speaker, Sir, Internationale Tourismusbörse Berlin (ITB) 2026 took place from 3rd March, 2026 to 5th March, 2026 at the Messe Berlin Exhibition Grounds. This historic instalment celebrated the 60th Anniversary of ITB, one of the world's leading travel trade shows. The Internationale Tourismusbörse Berlin in German is an exchange. It was established 60 years ago, and I remember I did my first ITB 40 years ago.

In numbers, this three-day exhibition completely filled the venue, welcoming:

- over 160 participating nations and territories and nearly 97,000 travel visitors;
- 5,601 exhibitors represented; and
- 400 industry experts led sessions spanning 17 specialised theme tracks.

Europe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, remains an important high-value tourism market for Fiji.

In 2025, European visitors accounted for approximately 5 percent of total arrivals, including 32,000 from Continental Europe and more than 13,000 from the United Kingdom (UK), demonstrating both the value and growth potential of this segment. For the first four months of 2026, Fiji received a record 10,697 European visitors, a record growth of 9 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of improving seamless air connectivity between Fiji and Europe, the Ministry is advancing the following measures.

Strengthening Airline Partnerships and Culture Arrangements: Recognising the geographic realities between Fiji and Europe, our strategy is to enhance connectivity through strategic airline partnerships and codeshare agreements. As I speak, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airways has already established arrangements that connect Fiji to Europe, including:

- A codeshare partnership with British Airways, enabling seamless connections between UK and Fiji via global hub cities.
- Membership in the Oneworld Alliance, which includes major European carriers such as British Airways, Finnair and Iberia, providing access to an extensive European network.
- Interline partnerships, including with airlines such as Etihad Airways, offering access to multiple European destinations through Middle Eastern hubs.

This approach leverages Fiji Airways' existing network to hubs such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo and the United States, enabling efficient one-stop connectivity into Europe.

Expanding Air Access through Global Aviation Networks: Mr. Speaker, Sir, ITB Berlin enabled direct engagement with aviation partners to explore opportunities to increase air access into Fiji, particularly from hubs that serve European markets.

The Government is working closely with Fiji Airways and its partner airlines to develop new cooperative and marketing arrangements with international carriers; and explore opportunities for seasonal or charter services to support European travel demand. This aligns with our broader strategy of strengthening global network integration through codesharing, alliances and partnerships.

Targeted Engagement with European Tour Operators and Wholesalers: A key outcome from ITB Berlin 2026 was the strengthening of relationships with leading European tour operators and travel distributors. Along with our Tourism Fiji Regional Office, I had the opportunity to meet Trade Press and Trade Partners. This could not be more timely with Fiji officially removed from the European Union's list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes. These partnerships are vital because tour operators help generate passenger demand, which underpins airline route decisions; and integrated travel packages support more consistent passenger flows or long-haul services. By working directly with these partners, the Ministry is actively stimulating demand to support enhanced air connectivity.

Promoting a High-Value Tourism Model to Support Route Sustainability: Fiji is pursuing a “high-value, low-impact” tourism model under the National Sustainable Tourism Framework. This is particularly important because European visitors tend to stay longer and spend more; and higher-yield markets improve the commercial viability of long-haul services.

By attracting high-value travellers, Fiji strengthens the business case for airlines to expand services and deepen connectivity with our destination. Through our engagement at ITB Berlin 2026, we are:

- building on existing airline partnerships, including with European and global alliance carriers;
- strengthening Fiji's position within international aviation networks;
- driving demand through targeted tourism promotion; and
- positioning Fiji as a premium and sustainable destination.

Together, those measures will progressively improve accessibility, convenience and connectivity between Fiji and European markets, while laying the foundation for stronger long-haul links in the future.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As alluded to by the honourable Minister, Europe continues to be an important high-yield market for Fiji. With plans to improve direct air connectivity between Fiji and the European market, will the Ministry of Tourism take the leading role in evaluating tourism infrastructure to handle rising visitor numbers and ensuring they meet visitors' demands?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, the infrastructure is here in Fiji to handle the numbers that we expect from Europe. We go back to the days when Europe used to be a 50,000-visitor arrival market - it used to be quite big in those days. That was largely driven by Korean Air, which used to fly from London into Seoul and Seoul into Nadi – a one-airline service, as opposed to what we have now where you would fly in with British Airways to Dallas or to Hong Kong or Singapore, and connect with Fiji Airways.

It is unfortunate that Korean Air has pulled out of Fiji about four years or five years ago. I spoke with the President of Korean Air. They were losing about \$5 million a year on this sector., and they are willing to relook at the situation. They are now merging with Asiana Airlines which will happen in December this year, and that will possibly enable them to relook at that connection, which is very vital for the European market.

However, going back to the question, the infrastructure is here to look after our European visitors. As I have highlighted, they tend to stay longer, and experiential tourism is the way for them to really explore the culture and the way of life here, and not only Fiji, but Fiji is the hub of the South Pacific for the Europe visitor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in light of the fact that you are looking at more connectivity out of Europe, and as you know very well, Sir, Europe could probably beat Australia in terms of numbers if we really tap into it, does that mean that we will also be increasing our presence in Europe via Tourism Fiji? Our presence there is quite small and I still understand it was always very small; it will require Tourism Fiji to have a larger presence in and around Europe if we are going to tap into the 50,000 people that you are actually talking about, so will that be increased?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. Europe is a very complex market. You are talking about the United Kingdom, and you are talking about the Scandinavian countries - the Central Europe and the Southern States, that is, Italy. Currently, we have an office in London, and representation in Germany, as well as in Italy. That is what we have right now in Europe and the UK.

As we can understand, lots of things have happened - COVID and now the conflict in the Middle East, which have impacted on the European and UK markets. Certainly, when the numbers build up - once they come back and normalcy returns, we will re-look at strengthening our presence in there. If you recall, we used to have a direct office in Berlin but right now, we are working through representatives, and the Office is in London right now.

Inspection/Enforcement Mechanisms – Unsafe Solar System Units
(Question No. 68/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister of Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on what inspection or enforcement mechanisms are in place at the point of importation to prevent unsafe solar system units from entering the Fijian market?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government recognises the growing demand for solar system units and renewable energies as part of Fiji's transition towards cleaner and more sustainable energy solution. The importation and use of solar products have increased in recent years, reflecting both consumer interest and government's commitment to renewable energy development.

While we have a checklist in line with the international standards and best practice for low voltage supply in electricals and solar at present, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are no comprehensive national standards or certification requirements, or enforcement mechanisms specifically governing the importation and quality assurance of solar units, and there are risks that substandard or unsuitable solar products may enter the solar market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, discussions are taking place with the relevant stakeholders to address these gaps, which will include reviewing of appropriate standard frameworks, and assessing enforcement and compliance mechanisms that will strengthen oversight of imported solar units.

The Ministry of Energy is engaging a consultant to carry out a study, among other issues, on the standard required and the required regulations to cater for solar products. The objective is to ensure that solar products entering the Fijian market are safe, reliable, fit for purpose, and aligned

with international best practices. Until such standards and enforcement mechanisms are fully developed and operationalised, Government will continue to exercise caution in relation to policy measures concerning the importation and regulation of solar system units.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development will continue to work closely with the Department of Energy and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that any fiscal or regulatory interventions are supported by an appropriate governance and compliance framework.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, if you are saying that we do not quite have the standards and we are looking at upgrading them, I know the Department of National Trade Measurements and Standards would be the Division that actually does all these, and they do not let anything in unless it complies with a particular standard. In light of what you are saying that we are still lacking in that particular area - have we engaged with development partners to ensure that substandard equipment does not get into Fiji to cause harm of some sort because I know previously that we have had help from Australia to house people at the Department of National Trade Measurements and Standards with respect to making sure that the standards were set?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for now, for inspections and installations, customers are encouraged as well by the Ministry of Energy, to ensure that products should comply with Australian standards. Part of the engagement with the consultant is to look at strengthening the gaps that we have.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Is the honourable Minister considering third-party verification, since we do not have a standard? It simply means that you have verified the exporters in certain places from where the importers can buy those products.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Yes, we look into it and it is part of the study as well.

Procurement of Waste Management Equipment
(Question No. 69/2026)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the Agent Agreement between the Ministry of Local Government and the Japan International Co-operation System for the procurement of waste management equipment?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for this important question regarding the agent agreement between the Ministry of Local Government and the Japan International Cooperation System (JICS) for the procurement of waste management equipment under the Japanese Economic and Social Development Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, waste management remains one of the most critical services delivered to Municipal Councils throughout Fiji. As urban the population continues to grow and commercial activities expand, the demand for reliable, efficient and environmentally responsible waste collection system has increased significantly.

The Coalition Government recognises that improving municipal waste management is essential, not only for public health and environmental protection, but also for tourism, economic development and the overall wellbeing of our communities.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has continued to be a trusted and valued partner of Fiji for many years. Japan has consistently supported Fiji's municipal development efforts through technical assistance, grant aid, infrastructure support, and waste management programmes that have directly benefited our Municipal Councils and ratepayers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a major milestone was recently achieved with the signing of the grant agreement between the Ministry of Local Government and the JICS, on behalf of JICA, for the procurement of heavy heavy equipment and machinery to support all 13 Municipal Councils in Fiji. This agreement was signed on 11th May, 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is also the first time that all Municipal Councils will be assisted through the supply of heavy waste management machinery. This assistance initiative originated through consultations conducted by the J-PRISM Project Team to all 13 Municipal Councils under the JICA supported J-PRISM3 Project. During these consultations, Municipal Councils identified critical gaps and immediate needs in heavy machinery and operational equipment required to effectively address increasing solid waste management challenges within their respective jurisdictions.

Following consultations between JICA and the Government of Japan, a proposal was favourably considered and approved, resulting in a grant allocation of approximately FJD12.5 million for the procurement of solid waste management heavy machinery and equipment for Fiji's Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the support is expected to significantly strengthen operational capacity of Councils in managing solid waste, improving service delivery to communities, enhance environmental protection efforts, and contribute towards a cleaner and healthier urban environment throughout Fiji.

Cabinet approved the formal agreement between the JICS and the Ministry of Local Government, which is now being executed, enabling procurement arrangements to proceed. The JICS is currently undertaking the procurement process in Japan for the supply of the approved equipment and machinery.

The Ministry of Local Government as the executing agency, on behalf of the Government of Fiji, has two arrangements under the grant agreement framework with JICA and appointed procurement agents at the JICS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of the agent agreement is to ensure that all procurement processes are conducted transparently, efficiently, and in accordance with JICA's international recognised procurement standards and guidelines. Under this arrangement, the JICS acts on behalf of the Government of Fiji to manage the procurement and execution process for the waste management equipment funded under the grant. This includes:

- preparation of technical specifications;
- tender documentation and bidding processes;
- supply selection and evaluation;
- contract management;
- quality assurance and inspections;
- shipment coordination;
- financial administration and payments; and
- reporting and monitoring equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this mechanism ensures that proper governance, accountability and value for money, through the use of grant assistance provided by the people and the Government of Japan.

The grant agreement further requires the establishment of a consultative committee, comprising of representatives from the Ministry of Local Government, JICA Fiji Office, Embassy of Japan and appointed agent for the JICS. This Committee is tasked to oversee the implementation of the programme, reviews progress, addresses operational challenges, and ensures the timely delivery and deployment of the equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the agreement, the Government of Fiji also undertakes several obligations to support the successful implementation of the programme. These include:

- opening and managing the designated grant account;
- ensuring customs duty and tax exemptions for the imported equipment;
- facilitating customs clearance and transportation;
- ensuring proper use and maintenance of the equipment;
- providing regular progress reports to JICA; and
- ensuring that donated equipment is utilised solely for municipal and non-commercial purposes.

The Government of Fiji acknowledges that several Municipal Councils face operational challenges due to ageing fleets, increase in maintenance costs, population growth, urban expansion and rising waste generation level. Therefore, the current programme, valued at approximately \$12.5 million, is both timely and necessary.

The new field allocation for the 2025-2026 programme has been carefully assessed in consultation with all municipal councils. Considerations have been given to population size, waste generation volumes, geographical coverage, operational demands, landfill management costs and existing fleet conditions.

The Ministry of Local Government will continue to work closely with JICA, JICS, municipal councils, and all relevant stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of this programme and the effective utilization of the equipment once delivered.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, are there any supplementary questions?

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament what measures are being put in place by the Ministry to ensure that the newly procured waste management vehicles and machinery are properly maintained and utilized?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the effectiveness of any waste management programme does not depend solely on the procurement of equipment, but equally on long-term sustainability, maintenance, and operational management of those assets after deployment to municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government fully recognized that in previous years several municipal councils have experienced operational difficulties due to aging machinery, insufficient maintenance budgets, shortage of spare parts and increasing operational demands resulting from urban growth as well as rising urban population.

The Ministry has taken several proactive measures under the current programme to address these concerns and strengthen long-term asset management across municipal councils.

The Ministry is strengthening accountability measures for councils receiving the equipment. Under the grant agreement obligations, municipal councils are required to ensure that all donated equipment is properly maintained, solely used for municipal council purposes, not transferred or disposed of, or written off without approval and regularly monitored and reported upon.

The Ministry will require councils to submit periodic operational and maintenance reports using vehicle utilisation rates, servicing of schedules, operational performance, downtime reports and maintenance expenditure. This will allow the Ministry to monitor fleet performance and identify emerging maintenance issues at an early stage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also working with the councils to improve preventative maintenance practices. It is one of the key lessons that we have learned from previous fleet management experiences, in the delay in servicing these vehicles which often lead to higher repair costs as well as shortened equipment lifespan.

As part of this programme, the councils will be encouraged to implement scheduled preventative servicing plans (very important), as well as routine inspections, operator accountability systems and asset management registers to track equipment conditions and usage. The Ministry is also exploring the development of standardized municipal fleet management guidelines to improve consistency across all councils.

Some training capacity building also forms an important component of the implementation programme and through coordination with JICA, JICS, suppliers and relevant technical partners. Training will also be provided for vehicle operators, workshop personnel, landfill operations, and municipal engineering staff.

The Ministry will continue to work with the councils to ensure that all these vehicles that have been donated are maintained and fully kept so that they can be well utilized by the council as long as they can hold on to those vehicles.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister and the Ministry for this continuous partnership. We have just heard about equipment that has been given to different municipalities. I would like to ask the honourable Minister whether the municipal councils will be able to share these equipment under the shared responsibility, because different ministries have been given different equipment. On a need basis, if the Councils will be allowed to share?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my response to the Oral Question, I mentioned that the Ministry had done consultation with all the municipal councils before we entered this agreement. Now the Ministry has a list of councils, equipment and machineries that are needed by all the councils. With the acquisition of these heavy machineries and other equipment that will be used or utilised by the Councils for the purpose of collection and disposal of waste management, I am certain that all the Councils will be able to have good compactor trucks to assist them in carrying out these very core basic services.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, does the equipment that you will possess have the ability to separate into degradable, biodegradable, et cetera, from an environmental perspective?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is one of the desires of not only the Ministry, but for the Government. At the moment we are trying to assist the councils in the collection of all solid wastes. We are also in the process of reviewing our waste management system, where we will be working with some of the smaller councils, where we will be doing the separation from source, and hopefully, will also be acquiring vehicles that will assist the councils in the collection of

waste after being separated. At the moment, we are collecting everything in the garbage compactor trucks that we have.

TSLS Scholarships and Tertiary Funding Assistance
(Question No. 70/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Minister for Education inform Parliament whether there have been any recent changes, agreements or administrative arrangements affecting the allocation of TSLS scholarships and tertiary funding assistance?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought the question would be ruled out of order. It seems to be contravening the Standing Orders to say that it is not subject to any specific subject. It is generalised. However, I will assist the honourable Member to give him the necessary response that he is requiring, provided he is also preparing supplementary questions to the question that he had asked.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, TSLS is a statutory autonomous body that provides funding through scholarships for Fijian students to undertake tertiary and vocational education. The scholarship allocation continues to be guided by the Tertiary Scholarship and Loan Service (TSLS) Act of 2014, approved government policy, national budget process, approved scheme criteria and the principles of fairness, transparency, merit, equity, national priority and accountability. What has changed, is the way TSLS is now managing the public investment entrusted to it.

Since January this year, TSLS has been undergoing a thorough evidence-based change management programme. This programme reviews the full operations of the organisation, including policy administration, financial controls, workflow, student support, legal compliance, data system, inter-agency coordination, service delivery, stakeholder engagement and monitoring of graduate outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is aligned with the functions of TSLS, under the law, including the processing of scheme applications, assessment of continuing students, development of payment and invoicing process, and in collaboration with the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services, Department of Immigration, and other government agencies for the enforcement and facilitation of schemes, repayments and other conditions. The Act also allows TSLS to request enrolment and academic information from eligible institutions to assist in the performance of its function.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other change is that TSLS is now moving away from the transactional approach, where scholarships are simply awarded and invoices being paid. We are now moving towards a more responsible partnership-based model, where tertiary education institutions, government agencies, employers, and communities share responsibility for student success.

Sir, TSLS is formalising letters of agreement with local tertiary institutions, including universities, to improve the way sponsored students are supported. For instance, under the draft Letter of Agreement with the University of the South Pacific, the University is expected to provide term-by-term enrolment reports, feedbacks on academic results and at-risk students, notification of disciplinary matters, welfare-related concerns, pastoral care for TSLS-sponsored students, and collaboration on technical Application Programme Interface (API), integration for seamless digital data sharing. These arrangements are not designed to reduce access, but to improve access, completion, reduce wastage, and ensure that public funding results in quality qualification.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, TSLS is also strengthening arrangements for overseas scholarship pathways. The Letter of Agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade is intended to expand overseas study opportunities by mapping scholarship programmes to national priority areas.

In relation to overseas universities, TSLS has secured standard Letters of Agreement that secure a better student support commitment and tuition-free reduction. I am pleased to state that a number of overseas arrangements provide approximately 25 percent tuition reduction and TSLS has also secured savings of more than \$1.5 million through such negotiated arrangements.

Another landmark administrative arrangement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the work now being undertaken with the Fiji National Provident Fund. This is the first time in the history of scholarship administration in Fiji, that TSLS is deliberately working to track return on investment at this level.

Government has invested about \$1.4 billion in scholarships and tertiary funding since 2014 and we must now ask the question, where are our graduates? Are they employed? Are they contributing to Fiji? And how can we improve the link between funding, graduation, employment and national services?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the TSLS advisory portal data and FNPF records, accessed through API-based matching, TSLS has the following preliminary snapshot for graduates after 2023. Total approximate graduates after 2023 are around 7,528. Total approximate graduates in employment with FNPF records is around 3,540 which accounts for 47 percent, and total approximate graduates with no employment records with FNPF is around 2,665 which accounts to 35 percent, total approximate graduate under FNPF but not currently employed is 1,323 which accounts to about 18 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these data are not being used to penalize students - it has been used to strengthen evidence-based policy. It allows TSLS and the Government to understand employment outcomes, bonding compliance, workforce absorption, migration trends, and areas where further support may be required. It is also important to note that no FNPF employment record does not automatically mean unemployment. Some graduates may be self-employed in overseas countries, engaged in further studies, in informal work, or subject to data-matching issues. That is precisely why TSLS is also progressing arrangements with the Department of Immigration, Ministry of Justice through Births, Deaths and Marriages, FRCS, and other agencies so that government can better understand the status of its investment and supports graduates appropriately.

We recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the iTaukei Land Trust Board, and this is part of bringing TSLS services closer to the people, including leases and landowning communities. The aim is to make scholarship and tertiary funding information more accessible, especially to families and communities that may not always have easy access to TSLS offices or online platforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are also broader policy reforms being considered through the 2026-2027 Budget process.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the increase in fuel prices, some have complained about increase in EFL prices as well. Is the honourable Minister considering increasing the allowances received by TELS students? Yes or No?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that can also be considered, given the endorsement of the TSLS Board.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for his reply. It is a bit concerning, the fact that 53 percent of the graduates, we are not too sure whether they are unemployed or where they are; that is a fairly substantive percentage. I am just wondering how this is now feeding into the Ministry's focus of how we are trying to make sure that the funds that we do give as scholarships actually lead to people that are employed?

That figure of 53 percent is high for me - that is 35 percent plus 18 percent of people that we are not too sure whether they are contributing back into the economy. What sort of policies is the Higher Education Commission or the TSLS Board looking to implement to remove that 53 percent down to below 40 percent; people have graduated and we do not know where they have gone.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, like I said, we have started with FNPF. We are also considering working with other agencies to try and address the gaps that you just alluded to.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister clarify whether there has been any change in policy or intention to attract and prioritise science, technical technology and mathematics students, or students in arts, commerce and social science under TELS scholarships with the number of scholarships or allowance?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot grasp the question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Can you please clarify? I think there are multiple questions you have asked, honourable Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister clarify whether there has been any change in policy or he intends to attract or prioritise science, technology or mathematics students, over the students in arts, commerce, and social science under TELS scholarship by number, scholarship, or allowance?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I will give you a chance to clarify further.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we always complain that we do not have maths teachers. We do not have science students, or physics and maths teachers in schools. Maybe this is one way to assist by getting more scholarship students in this area.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe one way I can answer the question is that every student applied for a programme – a programme of study. TSLS has a list of specific areas of need, and we do encourage students to undertake courses in those specific areas of need.

Equal Access to Special Education Services
(Question No. 71/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Information, and Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on the progress of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for the passenger carrier, Sinu-i-Wasa, that had been grounded along the beach of Toki in Levuka since *TC Winston* in 2016?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I do respond, I wish to join you as well to welcome my former boss, Professor Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate and her team. Great to see you again, Madam!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the vessel *MV Sinu-i-Wasa* has been grounded on the beach near Levuka since *TC Winston* in 2016, 10 years last month. Since 2016, it has become more than just a shipwreck, it has become a painful symbol of neglect and an enduring eyesore for the people of Ovalau. For nearby villages and communities, it sits as a daily reminder in waters that should reflect the beauty, history and pride of the people of Ovalau. Levuka, which is Fiji's historic town and a place of immense cultural significance, deserves coastlines that inspire hope and opportunity, not abandoned wreckage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also has its long-term effects on the marine environment, tourism, fisheries and the sense of pride that the people of Ovalau hold for their land and sea. The wreckage that has been there since 2016, there was not much action on it until 2023, when the Department of Environment and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) conducted a multiple site inspection following the ongoing concerns raised by the *qoliqoli* owners through the Lomaiviti Provincial Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the inspection confirmed that the vessel still contains material that must be responsibly managed before any removal or scraping works can proceed. These include traces of diesel in the engine room bilge; batteries; debris; and the possible presence of asbestos-containing material. The vessel owner was issued a notice by MSAF on 3rd February, 2023 on the clearing works required and the removal of the vessel. However, to-date, no action has been taken by the owner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the removal of the vessel would most probably involve cutting the vessel and would therefore require an initial EIA screening as stipulated under the Environment Management Act of 2005 and the Environment Management (Amendment) Act of 2025. The screening will help determine the appropriate level of environmental assessment, identify the safeguards required, and impose any conditions necessary to ensure that the vessel is removed safely and without causing further harm to the reef, coastal environment or surrounding *qoliqoli* area.

To-date, the Ministry has not received any EIA screening application for the proposed removal or scrapping of the *MV Sinu-i-Wasa*, either from the owner or from any vendor of MSAF that may be responsible for carrying out the removal works.

HON. RATU. J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister's answer. Despite the lack of progress by the owner of the *MV Sinu-i-Wasa*, what other programmes is Government progressing in the wider derelict vessel removal programme?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, it is important to put in perspective why there has been a delay, the Government is still progressing on other derelict vessels as well that is of great concern to our people.

In December last year, we are focusing on the vessels within Suva Harbour, as you know, Mr. Speaker, US\$1 million was secured from the Waitt Foundation to support the removal of these derelict vessels. The terms of reference for this work were evaluated by the Joint Maritime Environment Committee (JMEC) in September last year. We called for Expressions of Interest and they were evaluated, and there were panel of contractors who were jointly agreed by that Joint Maritime Enforcement Committee.

Fiji Ports Corporation as the regulatory authority to remove the vessels is managing these removal works and providing periodic reports to JMEC. To-date the official list of derelict vessels in the Suva Harbour has reduced from 44 vessels in 2024 to 24 vessels. In 2025, 13 vessels were removed and since January this year, seven further vessels have been removed. This includes six

vessels restored to operational status and removed from Suva Ports limits and one vessel safely scuttled at the approved coordinates provided by MSAF.

Mr. Speaker, going back to the removal of *MV Sinu-i-Wasa* would require more detailed technical assessment before removal can proceed as it is partially submerged. It is important to clarify the roles of the agencies involved.

Under section 6 of the Seaports Management Act 2005, the responsibility for managing the ports including Levuka Port is vested in Fiji Ports Corporation Limited. Further, section 27 of the same Act specifically provides powers in relation to the removal of derelict and dangerous vessels. In this case, the *MV Sinu-i-Wasa* lies outside of the Fiji Ports declared port jurisdiction and therefore, MSAF becomes the regulatory authority to issue removal orders.

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative for MSAF to pursue the owner of Sinu-i-Wasa, with all the powers it has been provided under its laws and regulations as the vessel owner is the first responsible for the removal. The Department of Environment's role is to ensure that the removal process complies with our environmental laws and to regularly monitor the risks of pollution caused by fuel or oil spills and the damages to the reef and coastal environment.

Sir, coming back to the question again that was directly asked, the EIA for Sinu-i-Wasa has not been undertaken because they have not applied (the owner). Screening applications is a mandatory legal requirement under our laws and critical first step before the department can determine the level of environment assessment required and before any removal works can proceed.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister and honourable Niudamu for the good combination of question and answers that have transpired across the floor.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from a sailor's perspective, a vessel sitting high above the water is much safer than a vessel that is actually grounded and remains in the water because the specifics that require the vessels hull to deteriorate is more in the water than out of the water.

I give credit to Mr. Naidu for actually buying the hotel next to the wreck because the owner had complained about it so he went and bought the whole property. I want to ask the honourable Minister, has she conceded those three vessels that has been in the bay of islands – *MV Spirit of Altruism*, *Westerland*, and a fishing vessel that is grounded and half submerged at Mosquito Island which is the priority in trying to remove this for the *qoliqoli* owners of Suvavou and the general villagers around the area?

MR. SPEAKER. - Honourable Minister, do you wish to respond? It is not quite on point, but it is relevant.

HON. L.D. TABUYA. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with the honourable Member. Many of us have gone to Mosquito Island for a picnic with our families, and it is very close and accessible. Unfortunately, when you look from the main road, you can see the grounded vessels there.

Again, honourable Member, as you know, this is still the same process. In order for derelict vessels to be removed, it needs to be done by the owner first – to apply for that same process, that is, an EIA screening application, which we have not received for those vessels either. Of course, MSAF or even Fiji Ports need to discuss it between themselves as to who is responsible to issue the removal order, and then we will be able to do our job. I absolutely agree with the honourable Member – they do need to be removed.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, we all understand the environmental issues that this particular abandoned ship has created. My question to you is, in the absence of there being authority with respect to ports, it is actually on a beach, and because it is such an urgent problem, and because your Ministry is sufficiently housed with respect to people who may be able to deal with asbestos, et cetera, for the sake of people from Levuka, why have you not gone to court? There is an admiralty jurisdiction that exists to be able to seize it and get it off if the owner does not.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, it could go to court, but again the primary authority of areas outside of Fiji Ports' jurisdiction is MSAF. So, it would be for MSAF to take the owners to court, not the Department of Environment. We will only act under the Environmental Management Act when a process has been initiated, and that is an EIA screening application. That is the current law, but it is certainly, I am calling on MSAF, which I had done in my answer previously to call on the owner to have it removed, and if not, then yes, it should be pursued in court.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think we will take one more oral question before we take our break. However, considering the lateness of the hour and for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move under Standing Order 6:

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I note the rest of the Oral Questions listed and, of course, the Written Questions, in addition to the Bills and motions that are in Schedule 2.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Financial and Logistical Support – Specialised Medical Treatment
(Question No. 72/2026)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services on the process used to assess and provide financial and logistical support to Fijian citizens who require specialised medical treatment abroad when such treatment is unavailable locally?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when a specialised medical care is unavailable at our local hospitals, the Ministry manages a dedicated Overseas Medical Referral Scheme to provide a lifeline to our citizens. In terms of the finer details of the scheme and the required documents, medical report is required to be written by a local consultant or a specialist. If the medical report is from the Registrar, it has to be approved by a consultant or a senior specialist.

The medical report should have the problem list, history, primary diagnosis, final diagnosis of the patient, clearly state the type of treatment that the patient requires that is not available locally. The patient is recommended for overseas treatment. Clearly state the patient's prognosis of health condition after the recommended treatment. Submit relevant documents relating to investigations and so forth.

The second one is their financial details to prove that they cannot afford to go for overseas treatment and would need Government's assistance. If employed:

- Recent pay slip, bank statements, FNPF interim statement, health insurance statement if applicable.
- Married with working children – same documents required from spouse and children – anyone financially supporting you.
- If you have other financial commitments, provide proof of loans, rent or hire purchase, et cetera.

All these requirements will have to be submitted with an application letter and will be assessed by the Overseas Medical Treatment Referral Board. The Board has the prerogative to approve or reject the applications. Again, depending on the family's financial capacity, the Ministry provides either full or partial support. This can cover for direct treatment costs, accommodation, meals, return airfares for the patient, and where necessary, the accompanying attendant.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question that I would like to ask the honourable Minister is regarding people moving around with letters from the Ministry of Health or from the district office, that they can do fundraising for medical treatment. From the public perspective, how would they know it is a genuine letter? Sometimes they keep on moving with that letter for several months, so how can we tighten this up so that we are able to understand from the public's perspective a genuine case or a scam?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to answer the question, we only deal with what we put in the letter with regards to

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- When a person gets a letter from the Ministry of Health saying that so-and-so has this kind of ailment and they want to raise funds to go abroad for treatment, I am talking about that letter. Sometimes those letters can be copied, and it is available on the social media as well as they go door-to-door collecting money - how would the public know that it is really a genuine case and not a scam?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- If they do want to know if it is a genuine letter issued by the Ministry, they will have to contact the Ministry so we can clarify that. However, in terms of the medical report, that is based on the request of the patient. They want a medical report, but anything to do with overseas referral, that is clearly articulated in the document that is given to the patient. The patient will then have to bring it to our Overseas Medical Referral Team at headquarters to ensure if they are eligible for assistance.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the honourable Minister has mentioned that some of the applications may be rejected for overseas medical treatment. I would like to know, if an application is rejected, is there any mechanism for appeal?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- As I had mentioned, it is the prerogative of the Overseas Referral Board. They are the ones who vet every case that comes in, and there are certain prerequisites involved for any patient to be successfully picked for overseas medical referral. Again, it is a fixed amount of money whereby we get a lot of requests, so that is why the criteria is there. I take my hat off to the team that does this, because day in day out, they are the ones who assess and have to face the patient and the relatives, to say that we can support you, or we cannot support you.

Plans for Introduction of Crop Insurance Cover
(Question No. 73/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Sugar Industry update Parliament if there are plans to introduce Crop Insurance Cover, especially for commercial farmers during natural disasters?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to respond to the question raised by the honourable Member regarding the sustainability of the agriculture sector in the phase of increasingly volatile climate. Today I wish to outline a strategic shift in our national policy, the transition towards crop insurance as the primary mechanism for covering rehabilitation costs and building resilient, investment-ready agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, when *TC Winston* tore through our islands in 2016, it broke the economic spine of thousands of our families. It cost an estimate of FJD542 million in damage, affecting roughly 20 percent of our commercial farmers. *TC Yasa* inflicted FJD147 million in losses, impacting 15 percent of our commercial sector. From *TC Cody* in 2022, *TC Mal* in 2023, devastating flood in 2024, and to the most recent *TC Vaianu* in 2026, we have seen a pattern, where even lower intensity events cause cumulative debilitating losses.

Mr. Speaker, the structure of our farming communities is that 83.6 percent of farming households are small scale. These are families living on the margins, where a single flood can mean the difference between sending a child to university or falling into a cycle of debt. Only 16.4 percent of farming households operate a medium-to-large commercial scale.

An intervention we design must be inclusive, accessible as the small-scale *dalo* farm in Taveuni as it is to the large-scale commercial poultry or sugarcane produced in Labasa. And currently, through local providers such as Sun Insurance, Fiji Care and Capital Insurance, in partnership with international development agencies, we have seen the introduction of parametrics micro-insurance, and bundled products. This has been particularly vital in our sugar sector, which has long served as a testing ground for risk sharing mechanisms. The sugar industry has taught us that insurance works best when it is integrated with financing and farmer support programme. It has shown us that while insurance can provide partial income protection and improve sustainability, penetration remains limited without two things - awareness and incentive.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is now looking beyond traditional models. We are actively exploring the expansion of the parametric insurance to the public, and to those unfamiliar with the term, traditional insurance models often require an insurance agent to physically visit a farm,

assess crop damage, and argue over the value of the losses. This process is long, and in many cases, by the time the compensation is disbursed, the planting season has already passed, leaving farmers unable to recover and sustain production.

Parametric insurance is different. It is triggered automatically based on pre-defined data - wind speed, millimeters of rainfall, or the track of the cyclone. The wind hits a certain speed, the payout is triggered. The rain exceeds a certain level, the payout is also triggered. The advantages are clear: speed payout can reach farmers in days, not months, allowing them to replant immediately. The transparency, there is no dispute over the value of damage and the data speaks for itself. When we talk about efficiency, it reduces the massive administration cost of sending assessors to every remote farm in our maritime provinces. For a small island development state like Fiji, where a timely response is the difference between food security and food imports, parametric insurance is the most logistic path forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason for the Ministry's intention to move, firstly, it enhances farmers' confidence. When a farmer knows they have a safety net, they are more likely to take the leap from subsistence to commercial agriculture. They are more likely to invest in better seeds, better machinery and better technology.

Secondly, it reduces the fiscal burden on the Government. Every dollar that the insurance company pays out is a dollar that the government does not have to divert from health, education and infrastructure for post-disaster support. We are moving from a model of government-funded disaster relief to a model of market-led disaster recovery. This vision is not a stand-alone project. It is a core pillar for Horizon 2030 - Fiji's pathway to a safe, resilient and innovative food system.

Under this framework, we are planning to develop a national crop insurance programme that will establish a public-private partnership to bring global insurance expertise to Fiji, introduce a targeted premium subsidy to ensure that our most vulnerable and most productive commercial farmers can afford coverage and invest in high-tech climate data system and digital tool to ensure our insurance triggers are accurate and fair. We will link insurance with concession findings so that an insured farmer is also a bankable farmer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know the challenges and we need better weather data. We need to build trust with farmers who have never used insurance before. We need to ensure that premiums do not become a burden that outweighs the benefits. We are moving towards a more resilient, protected, and investment-ready agriculture sector.

In conclusion, while a fully established nationwide scheme is a complex understanding that requires careful, evidence-based design, the Government is taking a deliberate step to ensure that our farmers are never left alone to face the fury of elements. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are shifting from uncertainty when waiting for aid to security with guaranteed recovery. This is how we protect our food security and this is how we protect our economy and protect our people.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister highlight more on the expansion of the insurance model from the sugar sector to non-sugar sector?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned that the parametric micro-insurance had been adapted and accepted, but at a small scale by some of our farmers and we now have the Fiji Crop & Livestock Council, which is actively working with our stakeholders, encouraging them to join the insurance scheme. The Ministry also maintains an awareness programme on technology and management systems that addresses the impact of climate change and also strategies in which they can manage after a disaster.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think it is an appropriate time to take our afternoon break. But before I do, I wish to inform all of you that the honourable Prime Minister had provided his additional response to the question that was posed by the honourable Premila Kumar at the last sitting period. The Business Committee has agreed that the honourable Prime Minister was required only to table his response on the floor of the House. That is now being tabled by the honourable Prime Minister and the Secretary-General has formally acknowledged its receipt.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 4.17 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.00 p.m.

Written Questions

Detailed Schedule – Road Construction and Maintenance
(Question No. 74/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport provide Parliament with a detailed schedule on the road construction and maintenance outputs achieved by the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) for each financial year from 2022 to the current 2025-2026 period, specifically categorised by the:

- (a) total distance (in kilometres) of existing sealed roads that have undergone full rehabilitation (ripped and remade);
- (b) total distance (in kilometres) of previously unsealed or gravel roads that have been newly sealed with bitumen; and
- (c) total distance (in kilometres) of entirely new road links that have been cut and constructed where no road previously existed?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Pilot Tourism Micro and Small Enterprises Fund
(Question No. 75/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament on the following, the:

- (a) total number of applications received under the Pilot Tourism Micro and Small Enterprises Fund;
- (b) total funds disbursed to date; and
- (c) categories of tourism businesses that have benefitted?

¹ HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response.

Statistics on Unplanned Electricity Outages
(Question No. 76/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Enterprises and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament on the following, the:

- (a) total number of unplanned electricity outages recorded by Energy Fiji Limited during the financial year 2024-2025;
- (b) average duration of those outages; and

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 75/2026 tabled by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation under Standing Order 45(3) is appended As Annexure I.

(c) capital programme for grid reliability over the financial year 2025-2026?

² HON. C.J. SINGH. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response.

Performance of Housing Authority
(Question No. 77/2026)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the performance of the Housing Authority over the past two years and in doing so:

- (a) update Parliament on the key achievements including progress and achievements in the provision of affordable and accessible housing, land development, and support available to low and middle income households;
- (b) plans and upcoming initiatives to further address the increasing demand for affordable, safe and accessible housing particularly for first-home buyers; and
- (c) how performance and service delivery have improved over the years?

³ HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response

Statement of Operational and Financial Outputs – Yellow Ribbon Programme
(Question No. 78/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General provide Parliament a detailed statement regarding the operational and financial outputs of the Yellow Ribbon Programme from the 2022 financial year to the 2025-2026 financial year, specifically the:

- (a) total number of inmates who were officially enrolled in the Yellow Ribbon Programme for each financial year; and
- (b) total value of financial or material assistance provided directly to these enrolled inmates upon their release or reintegration?

⁴ HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I hereby table my response.

Status of the Digital Agriculture Initiative
(Question No. 79/2026)

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

² Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 76/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Enterprises and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage & Arts under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

³ Reply to Written Question No. 77/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government under Standing Order 45(3) is appended As Annexure III.

⁴ Reply to Written Question No. 78/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General under Standing Order 45(3) is appended As Annexure IV.

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Sugar Industry update Parliament with respect to the following:

- (a) the status of the Ministry's digital agriculture initiative as announced in the 2025 National Agriculture Show; and
- (b) number of young farmers who have so far accessed funding or training for smart-farming technology in 2026?

⁵ HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - Mr. Speaker, I hereby table my response.

Statistics on Teacher Positions - Ministry of Education
(Question No. 80/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the following:

- (a) the number of teachers who are reporting to Ministry of Education Headquarters and District Education Offices, and the reason why they are reporting to the Education Office;
- (b) the number of post holders that are reporting to the District Education Offices and Headquarters because with their substantive positions, someone else has been appointed to act on; and
- (c) positions at the Ministry that no longer exist, but officers are still occupying them?

⁶ HON. A.M. RADRODRO. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response.

Status of Capital Projects – 2025-2026
(Question No. 81/2026)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on the following -

- (a) list of all commenced and continuing Capital Projects for the financial year 2025-2026 to date; and
- (b) indicate the status, that is, whether they are completed and/or still work in progress?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later date as allowed under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER.- I think considering the number of questions he had to answer this morning, the honourable Minister will table his response at the later sitting, under Standing Order 45(3).

⁵ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 79/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure V.

⁶ Reply to Written Question No. 80/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure VI.

Statistics on Government Vehicles
(Question No. 82/2026)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister of Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) the number of accidents involving Government vehicles (owned or leased) from March 2025 to April 2026, including the total cost of repairs and write-offs; and
- (b) a detailed breakdown of fuel expenditure for all Government vehicles, owned or leased on a yearly basis, from 2023 to date, and on a month-by-month basis for 2026 (January to May)?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later date as allowed under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, note that there will be two Bills for consideration today. The first one will be for first reading, and the second will be for the Committee of the Whole Parliament, followed by the Third Reading.

PASIFIKA COMMUNITIES UNIVERSITY BILL 2026

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

That the –

- (a) Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026 (Bill No. 09/2026), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at the next sitting of Parliament; and
- (e) Upon presentation of the report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving the motion.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, and I also take this time to acknowledge the presence of the members of the Pasifika Communities University; I hereby move the motion to table the Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026 under Standing Order 51.

The Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026 seeks to establish the Pasifika Communities University (PCU), as a body corporate by an Act of Parliament. Pasifika Communities University will replace the existing Pacific Theological College (PTC), which has operated for 65 years under a charitable trustee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it establishes the Pasifika Communities University to respond to the moral fragmentation of Fijian society and the region,

through its innovative programmes, based on indigenous knowledge and learning, and its faith and value-based education. Secondly, through this form of education, it equips our people, especially the younger generation, to build and strengthen the moral fabric and ethical values of our diverse communities. It is for these two reasons, and the urgency of this form of education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this Bill must be tabled and passed in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill will provide the Pasifika Communities University a legal status under the Fiji Higher Education Act 2008. This Bill will provide a robust, transparent, and accountable statutory framework for the Pasifika Communities University, enabling it to serve the tertiary education needs of diverse religions and indigenous communities in Fiji and the Pacific region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 1961, the university has retained its sphere of influence with regard to its faith and spiritual traditions, and to further this, with the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, traditions, and learning. Pasifika Communities University's mission is to equip leaders with the holistic moral education and soft skills required to navigate professional environments; contribute to the development of their communities and address the pressing challenges of our time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, leaders with a whole-of-life vision equipped with ethical and moral value education to support Pasifika society's sustainable development plans. The Bill is consistent with section 21 of the Higher Education Act 2008, under which the Higher Education Commission may provide a Bill for the establishment of a university to the Minister for Education for tabling in Parliament. Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon enactment, the university will become subject to the Higher Education Act 2008 and must formally apply for and receive registration and apply for a financial grant through the Higher Education Commission.

The Bill has been drafted in consultation with the Office of the Solicitor-General to ensure alignment with the Fiji National Legal Framework. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 2-Section 4, provision 3 of the Act, provides that the university is a body corporate with perpetual succession. This legal provision allows the university to own assets, enter into contracts, sue and be sued, and carry out all its acts necessary for its educational mission. This represents a significant improvement over the charitable trust structure, which lacks full legal capacity for a university operation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the university has a Board of Trustees that ensures that a body corporate is accountable to Part 2, Clause 4(3)(a) to (g) with expertise in finance, legal and management. The Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, establishes a governance framework to ensure separation of powers, accountability and academic integrity.

The *Va'atale* or *Va'atele* or Council, the governing body representing the 24, 20 founding member churches, represented by qualified heads of churches and appointed independent members who are qualified in the areas of expertise such as academic, finance, governance and human nurturing. This ensures that the university remains rooted in Pacific faith and indigenous traditions.

The *Uli* or the Executive Board is responsible for day-to-day administration, financial management and implementation of council decisions. They are represented by qualified individuals with expertise, heads of churches appointed by the council and the university management expertise.

Apou Tuolotu, the Academic Board, the independent body governing all academic matters, including curriculum excellence, quality assurance, and appropriate contextual research, is represented by qualified academics, professors, associate professors, and PhD holders, both internally and externally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this structure is instituted to ensure that it functions according to the requirements of the Act and in pursuance of the University's core business, which is the delivery of education — that is, whole of life, based on indigenous and religious faith traditions. These bodies ensure the monitoring, sustainability, and accountability of the university.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill designates 20 Pacific churches from 16 Pacific countries, including Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Kiribati, Tuvalu, and others, as members. They are the owners and primary funders of the University. Whilst there may be no direct financial commitment sought from the Government of Fiji through this Act, the University can still submit annual grant proposals to the Higher Education Commission, Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the member churches are independent religious entities in the countries they are situated in across the region, empowered by their own constitution and statutes as legal entities. They are, as owners of the University, supported through membership contributions, student fees, and grants. This ensures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, financial stability and sustainability without placing a mandate on the State, while maintaining regional ownership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill explicitly mandates academic freedom, ensuring non-discrimination and access for all qualified persons, regardless of background. The University is empowered to offer higher education programmes grounded in Judeo-Christian and ancestral indigenous traditions, while embracing interfaith learning and exchange.

The academic freedom is enshrined in the Pasifika Communities' University Academic Policy, particularly through the design of courses, research, academic workshops, conferences, and the freedom for academics to speak and articulate their views in a public forum or research initiative. While being true to the university vision and grounding, yet embracing inclusivity through interfaith learning, academic policies also support independent thinking, writing, publication and expression.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill includes comprehensive transitional provision to transfer all assets, liabilities, staff, and student records from the PTC to the Pasifika Communities University. The staff are to be transferred on the same terms and conditions provided in the current employment contracts. This protects the rights of existing employees and students, ensures continuity of academic programmes, and avoids legal uncertainty. The University retains the capabilities of its human resources and the values of its investments and properties through clear transition processes and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pasifika Communities University will be subject to the Higher Education Act 2008, including quality assurance and accreditation requirements of the Higher Education Commission Fiji (HECF). The Bill also requires the University to maintain proper financial records and submit to audits. Additionally, the *Va'atele* or the Council includes representatives of member churches, providing a layer of community accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statutory oversight by the Higher Education Commission of Fiji, combined with internal governance, creates a robust accountability framework that is already in place. The Pasifika Communities University will become a statutory body under the Higher Education Act 2008, enabling it to expand academically by offering accredited programmes beyond theology, including indigenous knowledge, skills training, and community development. Financially, it will be supported through church contributions, student fees, grants and internal revenue, with eligibility for competitive HECF funding.

In terms of human resources, Mr. Speaker, Sir, existing PTC staff will transfer with their current terms and conditions until transition to Pasifika Communities University contracts.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, the Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026 is a necessary and well-considered legislative measure in this era and for the Pasifika future in light of the University's unique form of education.

Through the Acts of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill establishes a university that delivers transformative education grounded in traditional knowledge, values, morals, ethics, religious faith, and Pasifika philosophy. This will ensure the survival, agency, and flourishing of Pasifika people identities, culture, and faith traditions through education that is whole-of-life and community-based.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill represents Fiji's national higher education framework, preserves Pacific indigenous faith, indigenous and faith traditions, and promotes interfaith academic college. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. At the end of the debate, I will call on the honourable Minister for his right of reply.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Pacific Theological College (PTC) has had a long and distinguished reputation and a contribution, particularly in matters related to Christianity, not only in Fiji, but also in the Pacific. I know that a lot of our Ministers here in Fiji got their graduate training and their postgraduate training at Pacific Theological College. Now, we also know that they are now moving into degrees and postgraduate programmes, and with 60-year long experience, it is good to see that they are moving to the next step.

For us, it would have been ideal for us to go through the full phase of all the stages of reviewing this particular Bill, because it is an entire Bill for the establishment of a university, which is not a small thing. However, the way that it is being done now, we could have wanted it to go through the full rigmarole of the way things are reviewed. However, I congratulate PTC for getting to this particular level, and I am glad to see the staff who are here. Very distinguished academic who has had a long, distinguished career in USP and other places. I think a lot of people in this house have actually been taught by some of the people there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know it is going to go to Committee, we will be working through it, and we look forward to being able to address this in the Committee.

One of the things that we have in the country is USP, a regional university, and this will be the second regional university in Fiji. It started off in terms of Christian teaching, divinity et cetera and now it is going to be the nexus between religion and indigenous Pacific culture to bring that up, because sometimes the conception of our own history is limited by the things that we read that are written by others. Maybe this is an opportunity for us, in the work that they will do, to explore our history from the way that we look at it. So, we look forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to being able to address it within the Committee and to come back eventually to Parliament.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wish to speak in support of the motion. Hopefully, with the Committee, a lot of issues can be heard and provide a profile for the University which, in terms of tourism, is a development that we work on.

I have shared in this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that according to the World Tourism and Travel Commission, tourism of the future will be driven largely by indigenous travel - the indigenous community will play a big role in tourism. However, for that to happen, we need to make sure that we protect what is unique to us, and I am pleased to see the establishment of the University and its focus on our values. This augurs well for the growth of this industry in Fiji and in the Pacific Islands.

I spoke earlier today about the European market, and these are people who come to Fiji and the Pacific, wanting to experience what our cultures and traditions are, so we cannot be assured that this will survive. We need to be reminded, and we need to pass this on to our future generation on the values we must protect.

I remember a case where I opened a new business operation in Vuadomo, Wailevu in Cakaudrove about two years ago. They performed a ritual to welcome me and to celebrate the opening of that occasion. There was an item there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was last performed 50 years ago before the day. They were fortunate that there was one remaining person who was able to show them how it was done. I always remember that. Of course, the value of tourism – that it helps revive culture and tradition in the communities, but the fact that it could have disappeared had they not known, or the expertise was no longer there. One person who remembered this taught the younger generation, and it is a very important part of the ritual in that part of Wailevu in Cakaudrove.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome the establishment of the University and for the tourism industry, this is a huge development, and I welcome them.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am going to be very brief. I was wondering if I did not speak. My good friend, Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, who I had the pleasure of working with at the University of the South Pacific for a long time. You know, we are both Deans of Faculties, and we had a great time of thinking about university policies, university governance and university structures. So, I am particularly delighted that she is the Chancellor of the University.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is necessary for a university to have a very defined system of governance structure. As you can see, it was explained too by the honourable Minister of Education with different components, including the council and the functions of the university and what powers of the university. So, I fully support the presentation of this Bill to firmly give recognition and the legislative background until the establishment of the university.

My view always has been, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the more the merrier. We have a number of universities. We had only one for many years, then we had another two, and we find that all of them are contributing in different ways. I am sure the Pasifika Communities University would be able to fill the gaps in areas where the current three universities may not be doing so, particularly in terms of curriculum that is embedded into the Pacific culture, tradition and so forth. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER. - I thank the honourable Member. I do not see any more contributions, so I will now call on the Minister for Education to speak in reply.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to thank all honourable Members who have spoken in support of the Bill that is before us. We hope that the transition through the Committee will be mindful of the timeline that has been given. We hope that they will come back with a more enlightened view of the proposed Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026 (Bill No. 09/2026), moved under Standing Order 51 and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights]

MR. SPEAKER.- I hope that the Pro-Chancellor, Dr. Kedrayate, and your executives of the Pasifika Communities University who are attending to witness the progress of your Bill, will now retire happy and satisfied.

We will move on to the next item and, that is, the Education Bill 2025. Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the second Bill for today. Parliament will first resolve into the Committee of the Whole Parliament. I will now join the Secretary-General at the Table.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION BILL 2025

In Committee:

Part 1 – Preliminary

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for comments on Part 1.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to move:

That Clause 2 - Interpretation, is amended by inserting the definition of ‘private schools’ - schools that is fully self-financed.

There is none at the moment.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the reason why I am making that amendment is that the Bill is already making reference to private schools on Clause 5(d). If you read Clause 5(d), it says ‘provide for the recognition and registration of Government schools, Government-aided schools and private schools’, but there is no definition given about private schools. So, it is for this reason that I am proposing that a private school definition should be given.

As you move on in the Bill, Clause 47, where there is a whole Division on private schools, and yet, in the Bill, there is no definition at all. There is a definition for Government-aided school, Government school, plus home schools, but no private schools. Therefore, as a government, we have a responsibility towards our parents and students, and it is extremely important that we put the definition with a clear demarcation in terms of not confusing schools that are run by churches, community groups, et cetera as a private school. Of course, we do have private schools in Fiji, and these private schools need to be approved, and I see there is a miss in terms of approving private schools, which I will be talking about later on, but let us start with the definition first.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I was not sure with respect to the reasoning. Honourable Kumar is saying that the definition should be fully privately funded. I am not sure whether the definition of private school should rest entirely on just how it is funded. I could be running a private school, I could be funding it, but I could also be getting funding from other sources, including the Government, and it is up to the Government to provide funding for a private school. I am not sure that defining that will completely restrict the ability to run a private school.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The definition, now honourable Member, as provided by honourable Kumar is that a private school means a school that is fully self-financed. Anything less than that or other than that will not fall into the category of private school under the definition. Am I reading that right?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, I am wondering whether that definition will exclude any kind of funding from Government or any other agency. Self-funding means the ability of the school to raise funding, so I am assuming that there is no restriction. Are you with that or you mean to say....

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the definition that we are trying to put in here is to demarcate that it is a school privately owned and privately financed. There is no assistance whatsoever from the Government, for example, we have international schools, we have Kids First, and there are a number of private schools in the country that are fully self-financed.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I just referred to the definition of 'schools', Government-aided schools, which is clearly stated on page 11, and Government schools. So, I think the definition of private school falls under Government-aided schools. They are not private, they are not Government-funded, they are not Government schools, but government-aided schools, so including private.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Kumar, do you wish to comment on that?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, Sir. On page 11, the reference, Minister is making on Government-aided school, it says 'be maintained out of public funds'. Similarly, Government schools are maintained out of public funds. So, they are both maintained out of public funds. But I am making reference to which basket or category you would put schools that are self-financed, self-owned, which we currently have in Fiji. How are you going to deal with the applications, et cetera. There is complete silence on that in the Bill, although we have private schools.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I do not get what you are trying to clarify, Madam. Is it the Government as private schools? They are not monitored, nor their programmes are dictated by.....

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No, I am not going that far. I am just looking at the categories that are being created, which are Government-aided schools where government funds are going. Then you have government schools, which are again funded by Government and Government-aided schools are all those schools owned by different community groups like Arya Samaj, Sanatan, Catholic, and Methodist. These are all aided schools, but in which category will you put Kids First, International Schools, and so forth? We can see, there are more schools opening up privately and in future, there will be a lot more. We have nothing in the Bill to really define private schools, or how will you handle the applications, et cetera for private schools?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I was just thinking, because the definition of a Government-aided and a Government school is very clear. It might still be appropriate, because apart from the religious organisations, there are, what you call might be private schools, but run by private individuals, communities. So, there are communities as well, so there's another definition.

My approach would be to leave the definition of government-aided and government schools and leave the private schools undefined. If the Government provides, I think that would be a better approach, because otherwise, you get caught up by, if, for example, there is, you know, you get a situation where somebody is trying to set up a school, say, in a remote area or remote island, putting in a lot of money, but says to Government, okay, you know, we will provide the core budget, but you do some other things. That would still be a private school, or it could have come into the definition of a grant-aided school, but owned by somebody else, just like communities. So, really defining it to the core may create unnecessary problems.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, there is a whole business line where people would like to open private schools, and parents would like to send their children to private schools, those who

can afford, but it is very important as a country that we protect the parents as well as the students, and it is for this reason that in the Bill itself, the whole issue of private schools is not stated, although we have private schools in the country, we do have private schools and, therefore, we got to have a definition to categorise what private schools are and how they are funded.

As honourable Professor Biman Prasad said, they would like to invest this money, fine, but they are asking for help from the Government. The answer is, a private school is one that invests all the money in setting up its schools. That is a private school. They will generate money from school fees, et cetera. They will also get money from their donors or going to put money out of their own pockets, whether as individuals, trustees, or whoever they are, but it is fully self-financed. There is no obligation in the future for private schools to also line up for funding from the Government. I am just trying to protect the Government.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are any other contributions?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, my interpretation, as far as these government-aided schools are concerned, is that private schools are not government-aided. They are not. So we need a definition for private schools. That is what honourable Premila Kumar is asking for. We have Government schools, Government-aided schools, and then we have private schools. Private schools are not Government-aided.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, my view is that we should not allow this amendment. It has gone through the Committee. Honourable Usamate, who seconded the motion, is one of the Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law, and Human Rights, and also honourable Koya. They have gone through that scrutiny. I think whatever the definition is in the interpretation is enough to differentiate what is a government-aided school and a private school. So, I suggest, Sir, that we object to the motion and proceed to the vote.

HON. J. USAMATE.- When we sit in the Committee, we sit as a bipartisan Committee, and what we present is the cumulative work that we agree upon as a Committee. There might be things there that we do not agree personally, but because we are working in a bipartisan Committee, the Bill itself is a reflection of that. I also have some amendments that I will propose, which are my own thinking as a Member of Parliament. That needs to be clear. We work in Committee, very bipartisan, but I am still a Member of Parliament with a brain, and I can also contribute here.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koya?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I completely support what honourable Usamate said, but I think, in support of what honourable Premila Kumar is saying, Mr. Chairman, it is the equivalent of an independent school. Those that may have been educated offshore know that private schools and independent schools exist in other countries like Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, et cetera, but they are classified as private schools. They are entirely funded by their own fees, et cetera. Even their curriculum is not developed like here in Fiji, for example.

We have an opportunity where universities from overseas may run particular courses. All they have to do is register. So, the private school definition really just needs to say, and not the way it has been said in the definition, maybe, and I agree with honourable Premila Kumar, that it needs to have a separate definition. When you say Government-aided school, the definition, Mr. Chairman, has three things, not owned by the Government, maintained out of public funds, and controlled by the Ministry.

In this particular case referred to by honourable Premila Kumar, these are not controlled by the Ministry. They are wholly, solely independent. There may be independent schools from different countries that may want to establish here and have an independent school which is privately funded and privately managed. I think we ought to look at it in terms of it is a business opportunity. They pay their taxes here, et cetera, and the only issue would be that they register with the Ministry of Education. I think that is the area where honourable Premila Kumar is coming from, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, perhaps to qualify it, I do not think there is any really truly private school in Fiji. I will qualify that because even though a child attends a private school, they are still entitled to the student bus fares, which is provided by Government. I know, because they can still take the school bus, and get the card and are entitled to it.

The Government does not stop them because they are in private schools to access student bus fares and benefits. That is a Government-provided funding, so they are Government-aided. They are not fully private, like we see overseas, where if you are in a fully private school, you are not entitled to government programmes. That is a choice that a parent makes, so they are accessing Government fund, they are being aided. They can take and do take public transport. I know because my child is in a private school, but he does have a bus card and he travels by bus to go to the pool with his group of students. So, they do access Government funding and therefore, we cannot put that definition, purely how it is being described because they are Government-aided schools. I do oppose the motion as well.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, that assistance that the honourable Minister is talking about is not assistance to the school, that is assistance for the student. That student pays a school fee, in other schools, the government pays the school fee. I have grandchildren that go to school that can apply for that free bus fare, but we pay for their bus fare, so it is not assistance to the school. Her definition is just about the school, I think that argument does not hold water because of what I am pointing out here.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Chairman, a private school is anything that does not fall within the definition of government school, government-aided school, home school or whatever the setup may be. I refer to Clause 2 on on the types of schools, which highlights how a school can be categorised according to ownership of funding. I oppose the motion because we cannot specify and there will not be any other amendment as proposed by honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, just to add to what has been said, for example, International School is government funded because the majority of parents are working for other governments, their fees are funded by those governments and even regional organisations, so you cannot really specify as the definition which you are proposing will restrict it. It is better not to include it because it is already listed as private schools, and the process too is there in clause 48. It is more advantageous not to define it, because it is more flexibility on their part.

From the Leader of Government Business, we agree with all the amendments brought forward by the honourable Minister for Education, the rest we do not agree with as brought by the Opposition; just to ease the process going forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Let me clarify that this process allows for amendments. I think it does not close the door on the draft that has come through. At any stage, where we are now, anyone can suggest an amendment. I am giving that recognition of what is happening by giving the amendments that have been suggested by honourable Kumar, that privilege to amend. It can be defeated if it comes to a vote. That is your privilege.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Chairman, my understanding regarding a private school, it is just the management of the school that is run by a private organisation or an individual. However, the curriculum and everything is government. My understanding, in Australia, some students choose private schools, but they go into the same competition, same curriculum as other public schools. It is just the management of the school that is private.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any further before we vote?

HON. J. USAMATE.- There are some schools they do not follow the local curriculum; they do not. They have their own curriculum.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Sir, I just want to clarify to honourable Usamate about what I submitted is that the school has to endorse that a child is attending that school then they can get that bus card. They cannot just go themselves to get a bus card. It needs to be done through the school. That is government-assisted; therefore, we do not really have any purely private schools in Fiji because students can access that provision by Government.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Last one, honourable Kumar.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No problem, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you withdrawing your amendment?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No, I am not. I am saying that once it is put to the vote, I will accept the defeat.

I just wanted to correct honourable Tabuya. When you say that a child gets a bus card, this is assistance to a child. Private school is running of that whole school and how are you assisting that school in terms of their building, like currently we give Free Education Grant (FEG) money. Private schools do not receive FEG. They charge fees, they raise funds and they run their school. I just wanted to clarify that, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now move to vote on the amendment that has been submitted by honourable Premila Kumar.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I seek leave to move an amendment to Clause 2 of the Bill. On the definition of “head of school”, I move:

That it be deleted and the head of school should reflect the person who is appointed by the Permanent Secretary for a government school and a government-aided school.

The head of school is responsible for the overall management and administration of the school and in a primary or secondary school, holds the position of head teacher, principal or any other equivalent. That is one motion, Sir.

Another one is the “local communities” definition on Page 12.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You are submitting two amendments so far for Clause 2?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Members do not know the amendments as such. All we have here are the red prints, correct?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- And they do not represent what you are reading. You have it there. Shall we start with the “head of school” first, if you do not mind?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The “head of school” definition that is in red to be deleted and amended with a proper definition to state that the head of school is appointed for a government school and a government-aided school by the Permanent Secretary. The head of school is also responsible for the overall management and administration of the school. In a primary school or secondary school holds the position of head teacher, principal, or any other relevant position.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Perhaps, we can have a copy of your amendments so that we can work with the rest of the honourable Members in discussing. The definition of the “head of school” as appearing in red there, to be deleted and replaced by the definition now submitted by the honourable Minister. It is quite lengthy.

“Head of School” or “Head of a School” means a person who:

- (a) is appointed by -
 - (i) for a government school and a government-aided school, the Permanent Secretary; and
- (b) is responsible for the overall management and administration of the school; and
- (c) in a primary school or secondary school holds the position of head teacher, principal, or any other equivalent position.

That is the new definition of “head of school”, to replace the one that is before you.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, that is the most long-winded definition I have ever heard. It just confuses people totally. Let me just say, a definition just specifies something. Here, we are trying to define the term “head of school”, because that term is used throughout the legislation, not the all the other stuff. It is just saying, this term, head of school and what it means.

The way that it is currently here, it means a teacher registered. “Registered” means approved, obviously by the Permanent Secretary, you' are registered, or you might want to change the word “registered” to something else. And then it talks about the two classes of schools, a head teacher for a primary school, a principal for a secondary school, that is it. I think the one that the honourable Minister's got is so long-winded, I got confused just trying to understand it. I think the one that we have now is good, so, I do not agree with the amendment, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Any more contributions to the debate on the new definition of “head of school” or “head of a school”?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I think we all went through a training session organised by Parliament recently, and in that session, we were taught how to make laws. One very important thing is, the language you use is simple, not complex, not convoluted, as we can see the definition proposed by the honourable Minister.

Currently, the definition is quite simple, it makes sense. When you talk to a head of school, you will know that the head teacher is the head of school, principal is the head of school, that is it. And they will not be in a school if they are not appointed by the Permanent Secretary; they cannot be in the school. So why do you want to qualify further by saying, who appoints, et cetera. It is just a definition, so that people can identify who the head of school is. So, when you walk into the school, you see the head teacher, “yes, that is the head of school.” And if you see the principal, now he or she is the head of school. No one is interested in how he or she was appointed.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- When the honourable Minister actually suggested the amendment, he did not say why he wanted it changed or what is the reason for it because, again, in agreement with the other two who have just spoken, less is more, more is less. What is in there covers everything and I think all the rest of the stuff that you have added to the definition is covered under one word - “registered”. And it is actually quite simple. I cannot understand unless the honourable Minister is saying that there is a specific reason why the definition needs to be that long-winded. Is there an alternative way that someone can be a head teacher or principal? Is that why you are actually doing the definition change?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted to justify my amendments when honourable Usamate jumped the gun, to put in his explanation. I think the definition there is not correct. As mentioned there, teachers registered as head teachers. Every teacher is a registered teacher. There is no registered head teacher. You are appointed to become a head of school, whether principal or a head teacher in a primary school level, based on the assessment and recommendations by the Permanent Secretary. And with it, Sir, comes additional responsibilities in terms of compliance.

The honourable Member was talking about teacher shortages, teacher needs, so that is all the responsibility that is required of the head of school to prepare and submit to divisional. So, it is not as simple as that. That carries a lot of responsibilities as head of school. There is no registered head of school. It all registered FTFA, registered teachers, and they are appointed to their respective positions, just like in any other profession.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. We will now vote.

HON. J. USAMATE.- If you do not mind, Sir. I think the point that I wanted to make, you are registered as a head teacher because you are appointed. It would be easier, if that is too difficult to understand, we can change the word “registered” for “appointed” and keep it nice, short and simple.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you wish to accept his amendment?

Question on amendment put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Go ahead honourable Minister, your second amendment on “local communities”.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, on “local communities”, the deletion of the definition of local communities and inserting the new definition, which means -

“a group of persons who:

- (a) are not indigenous to Fiji;
- (b) maybe of diverse origins;
- (c) share common social or cultural interests; and
- (d) have historical ties to Fiji.”

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I hereby second the motion.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, just a brief contribution on the amendments. I think the current definition, as is, is very broad and may be diverse in cultural nations, resulting in persons growing as part of our beloved country, creating specific and mandatory obligations on every school in Fiji to teach culture, customs, and history of any new group of communities. So, as is, the current definition is so broad and may unnecessarily put pressure on the Ministry of Education in terms of the specific groups that may need to be included in our curriculum system. We just wanted to redefine and shorten the definition of local communities as compared to what is there now. We wanted to re-define and shorten the definition of “local communities” as compared to what is there now.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think the way that it is specified now actually captures virtually all of the things that the honourable Minister has tried to put into his definition. But the use, you have to see whether it has an impact on any work of the Ministry, you have to see how the words “local communities” is used in the Act. The way that it is used there, the current definition that you have, there are a number of things in that definition. It talks about all classes of people who live in Fiji, and who are lawfully resident, those who are citizens of our country, they share a common social or cultural interest. That is basically what the honourable Minister is talking about. People of diverse origin forming part of the non-Indigenous population of Fiji.

The way that I look at it, the current definition captures what we mean by “local communities”. It has this other aspect of lawfully resident, that is not in the definition proposed by the honourable Minister, so I believe that the current definition is the better one.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any more contributions to the amendment from the Minister? Then we will proceed to vote.

Question on amendment put.

Clause 2 as amended agreed to.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, first of all I would like to make reference to page 13 and the definition is “teacher trainee”. I move that the word “is” be deleted before the word “not” in (b). It is a typographical error.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, it is a typographical error.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There is no issue on the amendment suggested by honourable Kumar. Honourable Members, do you agree?

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We do not need to vote on it, do we?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Then we will just take “is” out in (b).

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I move that clause 2 be amended by inserting “ECE Centre” and “special school” on pages 11 and 13 respectively as these two terms are not there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have to clarify specifically where you are going. On page 11, are you trying to make your insertion?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, ECE Centre will come just before Fiji National University; that is on page 11.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Before Fiji National University at page 11, you will insert ECE Centre?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What is the definition?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, the definition is Early Childhood Education Centre (ECE) provide structured care and learning for young children. I can see there is definition for primary school and secondary school, but “ECE” is missing.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you have a copy we can work on?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, you are suggesting that we insert “ECE Centre” before Fiji National University definition?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- And the definition of ECE Centre and special school?

HON. H. CHAND.- I have the definition here, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The two - ECE Centre and special school?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, Sir. Special school will come on page 13 and I have the definition for “special school” here with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Hem Chand, your amendment is that we insert the definition of ECE Centre or Early Childhood Education Centre provides structured care and learning for young children typically from birth to age six.

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think we will deal with both of them at the same time. Then we will go to the next definition of “special school” at page 13.

HON. H. CHAND.- Page 13, Sir, just after “secondary school”.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So a special school means a recognised education institution established for education, therapy support, functional learning, vocational training, transition and lifelong

learning for children and persons with disabilities from early childhood to adulthood.

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is your “special school” definition?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- To appear on page 13.

HON. H. CHAND.- Page 13 after “secondary school” definition.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We now begin our discussion on two insertions on new definitions. On page 11, first of all, just after the definition of council, you enter “ECE Centre”. ECE Centre is defined as ECE or Early Childhood Education Centre provides structured care and learning for young children. Are there any comments? We will discuss both of them, so the other one is special school, which will appear on page 13.

At the top, after secondary school comes “special school” which means a recognised education institution established for education, therapy support, functional learning, vocational training, transition, and lifelong learning for children and persons with disabilities from early childhood to adulthood.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- If the honourable mover of the motion can make references in the Bill where it supports its two new insertions in the Interpretation. Any specific clauses in the content that necessitates that?

HON. H. CHAND.- These two terms, I think it is all over the Bill. Page 24, we have got clause 40, Early Childhood Education is mentioned there, where we are talking about categories of education. On page 25, still under categories of education, we have got a special and inclusive education. There are many more places where these two terms are mentioned, and I think it is very important for us to define these two important terms. When we are defining primary and secondary, why not ECE and special education?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am just trying to understand the objective behind that, because if you look at page 24, you look at 39 and 40, page 40 says that the school may provide the following categories of education, early childhood education, primary, secondary, technical and special. So, it does have a provision for a special school. It says a school may, a school could be totally early childhood education school, so what is the purpose of that? I cannot understand.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my argument is, these two terms are not defined like primary school is defined, secondary school is defined. What about early childhood centres and special schools? The only thing that I am saying is, insert the definitions of these two terms - Early Childhood Centres and special schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN. - Since there are no other contributions, then that is much clearer. For the other one, ‘Special School’, on page 13, means a recognised educational institution, established for education, therapy support, functional learning, vocational training, transition and lifelong learning for children and persons with disabilities from early childhood to adulthood.

Those are the two amendments suggested by honourable Hem Chand. We will now vote on

the two suggested amendments.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Part 1.

Question put.

Part 1 agreed to.

Part 2 – Access to Education

Question put.

Part 2 agreed to.

Part 3 – Compulsory Education

Question put.

Part 3 agreed to.

Part 4 – Education Advisory Council

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Clause 14 be amended by inserting a representative from Early Childhood Education and Fiji Council of Special and Inclusive Educators Association.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Chairman, first of all, I strongly object to the amendment. This particular clause covers all that honourable Hem Chand tried to bring in terms of special education and ECEs. There was a submission from the Great Council of Chiefs to the Committee. The reason being because of the issues regarding iTaukei curriculum. We see that it is a must that we include the Great Council of Chiefs in this particular section, because of the need to protect the curriculum on iTaukei. So, for honourable Hem Chand to come up with that particular amendment, I think it is already covered in this particular section. Those are my contributions, Mr. Chairman.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, as far as the membership of the Council is concerned, I did not say anything about a nominee of the Great Council of Chiefs. I think the honourable member misunderstood me. I am moving, that the clause be amended by inserting a representative from Early Childhood Education Association and Fiji Council of Special and Inclusive Educators Association. That is what I am proposing. I am not against a nominee of the Great Council of Chiefs. I think he misunderstood me.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- I understand where honourable Hem Chand is coming from. I object to the amendment to include those two, because I understand that it is enough. It is already covered under Clause 14. However, what I would like to move on further and add on to is

why the Great Council of Chiefs was included, as it is a new inclusion. I want to clarify that part, Mr. Chairman.

HON. H. CHAND.- The reason why I have moved is that we have a representative from Early Childhood Education Association, because we have more than 850 ECE Centres in Fiji and looking at the number of educators that we have, it is more than 1,500. The reason why I am moving that we have a representative from the Fiji Council of Special and Inclusive Educators Association, there are 18 special schools in Fiji, and we have got close to 2,000 students. That is the reason why I am moving that the representatives from these two associations be included.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I do not support the motion because on the maximum of 10 representatives comprising at least a person with disability, so they are represented already. If you look at (h), (i) and (j).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Minister?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. - I do not agree with the motion that has been tabled here. Part of the primary school operation and secondary school operation are the ECE, so every ECE reports to a primary school head of school. So, their representative is here. That means they come and they also discuss ECE that is attached to their primary school. They cannot be independent. They are not operating independently. They are operating together under the premise of primary school operations. So, they are all covered Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will move on to honourable Hem Chand.

HON. H. CHAND.- I totally disagree with the honourable Minister for Education, because having representatives from primary, they do not know anything about early childhood education. These are two separate issues. Primary education is totally different from Early Childhood Education. Primary education is totally different from Special Inclusive Education. We need representatives from these two organisations, the Early Childhood Education Association and Special Inclusive Education Association.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now proceed to a vote on the amendments that have been suggested by honourable Hem Chand: that Clause 14 be amended by inserting ‘representative from ECE and the Fiji Council of Special Inclusive Educators Association’.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to make reference to Page No. 20 of the Bill, Clause 21(b). I move:

That Clause 21(b) be amended by inserting, after the word ‘Minister’, the words ‘within six months after the close of each financial year’.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That Clause 21(b) be amended by inserting, after the word ‘Minister’, the words “within six months after the close of each financial year”.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, Annual Report in Parliament. We have to cross out ‘as soon as

reasonably practicable’.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, delete ‘as soon as practicable’?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- In any case, it is already set out in Section 21: ‘Without limiting the rights of the Council to report any time, the Council must report as soon as practicable.’ So it is already covered there in any case.

The amendments by honourable Premila Kumar is to insert at 21(b), after the word ‘Minister’, the phrase ‘within six months after the close of each financial year, who must table the Annual Report in Parliament’.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the reason why I have proposed this amendment is that we have seen in Parliament that annual reports do not reach us. Why? Because of these loose-ended wordings in the Bill, we are not stipulating a timeframe within which the annual report must be submitted.

Again, another issue is that as you go through the Bill, in other places the timeframe is stated, but here the timeframe is not stated. It is important that we state the timeframe within which the responsibility is on the Minister to bring that annual report into Parliament. It is for this reason, Sir, I am proposing the amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any contributions?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, I oppose the proposition by the honourable Premila Kumar, not simply because she sits on the other side of the House and the Minister for Education sponsoring this Bill, sits behind me, but let us be practical about things. Whilst we would want to impose statutory timelines, which should guide, and in most instances, enforce performance and compliance. At the same time, we have to be realistic about the space in which the Office of the Auditor-General currently has.

The Ministry for Education is the biggest Ministry in the Civil Service, and so it is assumed that if all the Ministries of Civil Service finalise their books after the close of any financial year, there would be a clog at the Office of the Auditor-General. They would have to look at these statutory impositions, and quite possibly, the result of that might be that some of the work may not be done properly.

I like the wording as it is, and you and I, Mr. Chairman, have practiced on the other side of the House. It is giving a very fair and balanced position that once you get your report, depending on whether or not the Auditor-General will complete their job on time. We would want to have the Auditor-General look at our books and return a report to us on time, however, I think we manage what we can, and inside this House, it is when that report lands on the table of the Minister, and that is what we should be managing. It is the Minister responsible who then has to table that report to Parliament.

Honourable Kumar understands because we have had to deal with outdated Annual Reports from years ago. We have to be realistic too about the space that auditors have and need in order to give you an accurate report for us to come and discuss in Parliament. So, I place my opposition on the caveat that it is better to have a report when the Auditor-General is satisfied that the report is ready to be admitted to the Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is the annual report of what the Council has talked about.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I was listening to honourable Vosarogo's argument very well. If that is his argument, then I would like him to refer to Clause (157) of the same Bill, which is page 60, where a timeframe has clearly been put down by when the Fiji Higher Education Commission must submit their report.

There is inconsistency in the Bill. At one place, you are stipulating a time frame, whilst in other places you are not. Why are we not doing the same thing for other institutions that are looked after by the Ministry of Education? For example, the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) or the Fiji Teacher Registration Authority (FTRA). They all have to submit their Annual Reports, except in this case, as I mentioned, on Clause (157), it says on or before 30th April of the following year. The reason I am proposing six months after the close of each financial year is in case, the Government decides to use the financial year as a calendar year. So, it will not matter, and it is for this reason that I propose the change because it is not consistent. That is all!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Chairman, I disagree with honourable Kumar, and I agree with honourable Vosarogo. The world is perfect. It is professional and practicable, for example, if something happened, like a disaster or a pandemic, whereby the Ministry itself cannot afford to provide the report within those six months. What will happen? I think we will leave it as it is. It is very professional, practicable and flexible.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, very briefly, I had the opportunity to look at the proposed section 60 of the Education Bill 2025. I am sure that honourable Premila Kumar would appreciate that the Fiji Higher Education has a different set of powers and a different set of responsibilities. The one that we are dealing with now, the Council powers and responsibilities are much, much more huge than that of Fiji Higher Education Commission.

Initially, I think she will appreciate that once this Bill is passed and the Council will be convened, I am sure we should be expecting some teething problems in the establishment of the Commission and its operationalisation of their legislative mandate. So, yes, I have read your section. I have heard your argument. I hope that you hear mine.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, this Council is an Advisory Council. The Higher Education Commission has powers. It penalises, it imposes, it registers, and they have strict guidelines. This is an Advisory Council. So, why can we not put the time in? I mean, the way the honourable Minister is talking is about the Council has far more regulatory powers. It is just an advisory Council. Higher Education Commission has powers, and they are given strict guidelines. So that argument does not hold, sir. That is my opinion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Exactly why there are two levels. The Council at the bottom and Higher Education Commission is on top. That is the very reason they do not impose a time limit on them to submit. It is too cumbersome for them to do so if they do not submit, but however, there is a high level of responsibility on the higher education. I think we should maintain as it drafted.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Sir, just to try and add some closure to the motion presented by honourable Premila Kumar. Firstly, I do not support the motion.

Secondly, for closure, she can rely on section 49 of the Financial Management Act which deals with Annual Reports. There is a clear section there on when the Annual Report is to be tabled in Parliament by the honourable Minister. So, adding that to this Bill is not necessary. They can just align that to the Financial Management Act. So, we can just proceed.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just my last argument to put across what the honourable Member just said. The reason why we are receiving timely reports from Reserve Bank of Fiji, Fiji National Provident Fund and particularly RBF because they have got a timeframe within which they must submit. The timeframe is within six months. In fact, for them, is within four months after the end of the financial year.

Going forward, it is extremely important that we must stipulate the timeframe because that will make things more efficient and old reports will not come to Parliament because it is an obligation. That is why we appoint people to authority. They become CEOs, permanent secretaries, it is their job to bring the reports. It is not the Minister's job. It is not your job. So, we are talking about higher education here again whether it is Higher Education or other sections of this Bill they all need to submit the report in a timely manner, and it is important that we make them responsible. It is a session where you just come together with the advisory council, and then whenever it is practical, you will submit. If it is not practical this year, I can submit my report after three years because that is when it is practical to me. That is what it says.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now move on to vote on the amendment submitted by honourable Premila Kumar that an addition of two amendments to Clause 21(b) to read, submit a copy of the Annual Report to the Minister within six months after the close of each financial year who must table the Annual Report in Parliament.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Part 4

Question put.

Part 4 agreed to.

Part 5 – Curriculum Development and Assessment

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I move:

That in Clause 23(3)(c), after Vosa Vaka-Viti, to insert Hindi, Urdu, Rotuman and other prescribed languages.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The amendment is to specifically list out the current languages that are taught in schools. We also have the resources in schools in terms of the languages that are being proposed to include Hindi, Urdu and Rotuman.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I know the honourable Minister has put in some specific things, such as Hindi, Urdu and Rotuman, but we have a very large Chinese community. If we are going to go down this particular road of putting in the communities, and I think in some of the other things that we have, we have put Chinese in there. Is there a reason why he is leaving Chinese out, or are you just saying that it is covered under other languages prescribed? Is there a reason why he is leaving Chinese out, or are you just saying that it is covered under other languages prescribed?

I would suggest that the honourable Minister add Chinese to it. We have a very good alumni

out of our Chinese schools and they have done extremely well and done a great service to Fiji also, Sir. So, their recognition, Yat-Sen is a phenomenal school, and I think it would be good to add Chinese to those, of course there are other languages that are being, maybe on a smaller scale, that can get covered under other languages, but in terms of putting it in there, I would suggest adding Chinese to it.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The amendments are basically what is currently being taught in schools right now. It is a mandatory subject.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you have a catch-all phrase? Are there any other that may be prescribed? Right, that is good. I understand where honourable Koya is coming from, but that is the Minister's amendments. So, amendment to Clause 23(3)(c) to include specifically Hindi, Urdu, Rotuman, and after that, any other that may be prescribed. Any other that may be prescribed.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- If we are going to leave out Chinese, then why do we not cover everyone under other languages? I mean, it does not make sense. Why would it be offensive to use a harsh word, to add Chinese? We are covering the other languages in terms of, for example, the Sangam school might teach Tamil or Telugu or Malayalam. That is a very minuscule amount of the population that gets covered.

We have got a phenomenal Chinese population that needs recognition also, by simply putting Chinese. It does not make sense otherwise. We need to be treating everyone equally here, Sir. They have formed a huge part of our society for donkey's years, and I think if we are going to name that, it is being discriminatory to the Chinese population of Fiji. I think we need to recognise that and to be honest, Yat-Sen School, Lautoka Chinese School, have provided phenomenal people in this country. It is just recognition. Why would there be an objection from the Minister to add Chinese and leave them in the other basket?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, as I have mentioned before, these are the mandatory subjects that have been taught in schools, in all schools around Fiji. I think Chinese is only taught in Chinese schools. It's not a mandatory subject in Government schools, nor in other faith-based schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Minister is not in favour of your amendments, honourable Koya?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just to help, I think I understand the argument by honourable Koya, but I think the real issue. Historically, Vosa Vaka-Viti and Hindi were taught in almost all primary schools in the country. There are schools which specialised in teaching of Urdu, there are schools which tried to teach Tamil, Telugu, Chinese, so if you talk about language, you could be talking about a few others in the next five or six years.

I think the original amendment that was there was Vosa-Vaka-Viti, Hindi and other languages, which covered every other smaller number, but also important languages. So, if we add Chinese, if we add Telugu, Tamil, you might have to add Bengali as well, or something. I think that is sufficient at the moment or you just keep Vosa-Vakaviti and Hindi and other languages. That might be a neater way of saying Vosa Vaka-Viti, Hindi and other languages, because these are the two main languages taught, historically, in all the primary and secondary schools. I mean, that makes it easier.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, it is your say. As honourable Professor Prasad said, to include *Vosa Vaka-Viti*, *Hindi* or any other languages.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I will go along with that amendment, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Clause 23(3)(c) will be amended, as proposed by the honourable Minister, to say after *Vosa Vaka Viti*, insert '*Hindi* and any other language' but it has already prescribed?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Prescribed languages, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So now it is just the *Vosa Vaka-Viti*, *Hindi*, or any other that may be prescribed. It is now.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, if I may, by reason of this, there are only two languages that are to be taught compulsorily from this, which the schools do, which is fair enough. But we are being all-inclusive by including *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and *Hindi*, and we do not name the Rotumans and the Chinese?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Prescribed languages.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- So you are including them in prescribed languages?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Other prescribed languages.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I give up, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will vote on the honourable Minister's amendment to Clause 23(3)(c).

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Rotuman and any other prescribed language.

Question on amendment put.

Clause 23 as amended agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I must say, honourable Koya, I did not reveal that I have very close, as you know, Chinese as well as Rotuman connections.

We are still in Part 5, so I will call the honourable Hem Chand to move his motion.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Clause 25 be amended by inserting the following:

- (1) a qualified an experienced primary curriculum specialist.
- (2) a qualified an experienced secondary curriculum specialist.
- (3) a qualified an experienced early childhood education curriculum specialist.
- (4) a qualified an experienced special inclusive education curriculum specialist.

At the moment, we only have a qualified and experienced curriculum specialist.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The amendment proposed by honourable Hem Chand will include other categories in Clause 25. Those are the four new categories of persons that honourable Chand wishes to be included as the members of the Authority under Clause 25.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for contribution, but there being no contribution, we will proceed to the vote.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We move on to the second amendment to Part 5.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I refer to Clause (32) (b) on page 23 and I move:

That it be amended to include the following words, “within six months after the close of each financial year.”

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The amendment is submitted by honourable Premila Kumar to Clause (32) (b), to read after the word ‘Minister’, the words; “Within six months after the close of each financial year.”

Submit a copy of the Annual Report to the Minister within six months after the close of each financial year, who then must table the Annual Report in Parliament. Those are the suggested amendments.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my arguments are still the same. It is to prevent tabling of all Annual Reports in the Parliament by specifically stating by when Annual Reports must be tabled. This will allow Parliament and the public to scrutinise how public funds were used and services delivered. Why six months?

As I mentioned earlier, in case the Government (s) come and they want to change the financial year, for example, rather than saying April, June or July, it is better to say three, four or six months after the end of the financial year. With that thinking I am proposing the change.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Any contribution from the floor on the suggested amendment by honourable Kumar? I do not see any, so we will proceed to the vote. As I read out, “within six months after the close of each financial year”, to be inserted after the word ‘Minister’ in Clause 32 (b).

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on to the whole of Part 5. Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Part 5 agreed to.

Part 6 - Schools

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Clause 38 be amended by inserting mobile school to the types of schools, Page 24, Clause 38. We have got Government school, Government aided school, private school, home school and my proposal is that we add mobile schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Alright, honourable Hem Chand has suggested the amendment to Clause 38, new addition to the classes of schools that are there to include mobile schools. The definition you put here?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, I have given the definition, Sir. The definition for mobile schools is — these are specialised portable educational units designed to bring learning to remote or underserved areas. For the information of the House, we do have mobile schools in Fiji.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, can I get it from you, honourable Hem Chand that this definition will go to Clause 2 definition of what the mobile school is?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I will provide the definition, but I think I have given the definition.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You got it here. I am just saying the placement. It will not go the way you suggested.

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, but the only thing that will be inserted is mobile schools.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I beg to second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We open the floor for discussion on the suggestion amendment by honourable Hem Chand to include under Clause 38, mobile school to the classes of schools that are there in (a), (b), (c), (d) and € will be mobile schools. Are there any comments?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It does not make any sense. The question is the mode of ownership, Government, Government aided, private and home. It does not make any sense when you want mobile schools.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, we do have mobile schools in Fiji, and I am aware that there is one mobile school in Nadi. This is a preschool which is a mobile school.

I think the honourable Minister is aware of this mobile school, which is in Nadi. There is one in Nadi that I am aware of. Maybe there are more mobile schools in Fiji, but early childhood, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Maybe I have heard comments about the definition. I might as well read the definition that has been provided what a mobile school is, according to honourable Hem Chand. These schools on wheels are often housed in converted buses, vans or mobile trailers. Do I hear any more?

Since there are no more contributions to the suggested or to the amendment by honourable Hem Chand, we will vote on it.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Part 6.

Question put.

Part 6 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, I am advised that dinner is ready, so we will take 45 minutes to allow you to have a good dinner, and then we will resume after that. The House is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.20 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.07 p.m.

Part 7 – Establishing and Closing Schools

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the Committee of the Whole of Parliament will resume its deliberation on the Education Bill 2025. The floor is now open for comments on Part 7.

HON. P.D. KUMAR .- Mr. Chairman, I am referring to page 29. I move:

That a new Clause 59 be inserted after Clause 58, and should be titled, “Approving Private Schools”.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you wish to proceed with the amendments?

HON. P. D. KUMAR .- Yes, Sir. The amendment is the inclusion of a new Clause 59, titled “Approving Private Schools”. Clause 59(1):

- (a) the Permanent Secretary may only approve a private school if the proposed site of the school and its facilities are suitable and adequate for the education of a student.
- (b) the proposed private school will be in the best interest of the student, proof of sustainable funding model, the proposed person providing instruction to the student is not prohibited or not likely to be prohibited from carrying out the role under Clause 164. The school meets any other prescribed requirements.
- (c) A person who intends to set up a private school must apply to the Permanent Secretary for approval.
- (d) The application must be in writing and accompanied by the prescribed fee.
- (e) The Permanent Secretary may impose conditions together with approval of an application and the applicant must comply with those conditions.
- (f) The Permanent Secretary may notify the applicant in writing of:
 - (i) the Permanent Secretary’s decision to approve or refuse application; and
 - (ii) in the case of refusal, the applicant's right to appeal the decision under Clause 61.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- As I started off with the definition of private school, which was not accepted by the honourable Members, let me just draw the attention on page 24 of the Bill, Part 6, titled Schools. It says, “Types of schools”. In the types of schools, one is government school, two is government-aided school, three is private school, and four is home school.

There is no definition of private school at all, and then as we move on to page 26 of the Bill, Division 4 is about Private Schools. You can see how this Bill has been drafted. You do not have a definition of private school, you recognise them as four types of schools, and private school is the fourth type of school.

As we go down with different clauses and different Divisions, then you come across Division 4 as Private Schools. As you move forward, you have provision of how you will approve home schools, but there is no provision whatsoever how you will approve private schools. This is the problem with the Bill. You recognise four types of schools, yet you do not want to give a definition to private school. As we move on, you do not even have a provision as to how you will approve a private school. For that reason, I have proposed a new Clause 59 as to how a private school should be approved.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, I may need some backup on this from honourable Koya, but I am happy that honourable Premila Kumar has raised the reference to proposed Clause 38 and I quote:

“A school may be, according to the mode of ownership or funding of the school, one of the following types -

- (a) government school;
- (b) government-aided school;
- (c) private school; or
- (d) home school.”

The “or” represents a notation that perhaps in the definition of how a school is approved and how a school is closed, wherever you find a reference to closure of home schools, closure of private schools or vice-versa , that by definition or classification under clause 38, it is meant to operate on the other type of school. The presence of “or” there, is to me, an indication that they are to be treated alike in both definition and in operation of establishment and closure. There cannot be any other explanation as to why “or” is there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, are you familiar with what the honourable Minster is talking about? That “or” means in the circumstance of this case, it is either one or the other, so it cannot be both because there is no “and” there. Honorable Kumar, do you wish to contribute?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, Sir, and that is where the error is also. If you look at page 12 of the Bill, it defines home school and I quote; “means an arrangement to provide an education to a student at any home or other approved location, not including at a government school, government-aided school or private school”, so it is very clear cut.

They recognise four types of schools, but unfortunately, we do not have the definition, we do not even have the provision as to how we are going to approve a private school. And private school is very important to be included in the Bill, let us not play politics here, let us not, your views and my views, it is good for the country, if someone wants to come and invest in a private school. So, I am speaking purely from that angle that we need to protect our parents as well as our students.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think the point that is being made by the honourable Premila Kumar is a very valid point. We have four specifications of different types of schools. For a number of them, the manner in which they can be recognized is specified, and to a large degree, their criteria is almost the same, for the different kinds of schools.

However, if you are going to articulate for one type of school, rather than have a blanket provision that covers all of them, because this is one kind of school, there should be a specific provision for it, or have a blanket criteria that covers all the different types of schools. So, if you think about it, it is logical and it is valid and I would totally endorse what she is suggesting for us to consider.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you suggesting, honourable Kumar, that the definition of home school under page 12 is quite contrary to the definition of schools in Part 6 because I read it otherwise?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I was trying to qualify the fact that the Bill is talking about four types of schools, although it is using the word “or”. However, when you look at the definition of home

school, it very clearly talks about, if you read towards the end, this is not including at a government school, government-aided school, or private school. Again, it says three items.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, that is what I am talking about. If you stay that, then it coincides with the provisions of clause 38. You either be the private school or home school and that home school, under the definition of school does not include government school or private school.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Correct, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So we are reading from the same page. We have to deal with the amendments by the honourable Kumar, which creates approving private schools as a separate clause - Clause 59. After Clause 58, to define and approve private schools, and if you wish, I can go over it again, as she had said.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Just to confuse everyone a little bit more, if you move forward, Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is a Division 4, which says private schools. It actually spells out that a controlling authority of a private school has control of the private school. The controlling authority of a private school must appoint a Manager and then Permanent Secretary, et cetera.

I am not sure where the resistance is coming from because this is neither political nor any party thing involved in it. It is just being sensible, Sir. It is being sensible because the category that has been created - let me just move forward a little bit to the budget, and Fiji as an education destination, as a tourism education destination. Tomorrow, if the honourable Minister for Finance, on the insistence of the Minister for Tourism, says, “we need to open up to create more schools here, private schools that people will come and pay”, they are devoid of everything that comes within this Act with respect to schools except for registration. If the honourable Minister says, “we are going to allow tax-free schools here, private institutions to have schools here”, suddenly we have boosted the tourism industry and we have got a whole lot of students coming from Japan, England, Australia and from wherever coming to do school here. The curriculum is elsewhere, outside the ambit of this particular Act.

In terms of definitions, et cetera, it does need what honourable Premila Kumar is actually referring to, and I do not think it is offensive in any part, and it should not really show any resistance, because we are just creating another avenue for the betterment of Fiji and our economic situation generally. I can tell you this much, Sir, educational tourism is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and I am sure the honourable Minister for Tourism will actually tell you that.

I am looking at it from that perspective. If we create the category, we define it properly, that is an avenue for us to use with respect to our economic playing field. It will require a definition, if we do not get it right, just the very same way we are asking universities to get registered if they want to become universities, the same thing applies. So, defining this and putting it in - maybe you can tweak it a little bit, whatever it is - it makes sense, it really does.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any more contributions? As the worst-case scenario, if I am just using my other hat, as honourable Koya is saying, everything does come apart when this is enacted. Then the amendments, you can always go back and amend the provisions. That is the worst-case scenario I am talking about.

What we do is proceed with a vote on the suggested amendments to include new clause 59 by honourable Premila Kumar, which she had already read out in quite detail, in fact, for private schools. Unfortunately, the definition, as we started on this was not approved, so that would not help this cause altogether, as you understand.

Honourable Members, we will put honourable Premila Kumar's amendments to a vote.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN. - We will now proceed to vote on Part 7.

Question put.

Part 7 agreed to.

Part 8 – School Regulation

Question put.

Part 8 agreed to.

Part 9 – Administration

Question put.

Part 9 agreed to.

Part 10 – Student Behaviour and Well-Being

Question put.

Part 10 agreed to.

Part 11 – Financing and Accountability

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- On Page 37, I move:

That Clause 75(3) be amended to insert a new (c) which states:

“A Government school or Government – aided school must not force, compel, coerce, intimidate or apply pressure to parents or students to pay school levies.”

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I am proposing this amendment in the spirit of free education. We want to protect most vulnerable families who may not be in a position to pay school levies, and we do not want to go back to the olden days when students could not pay school fees or school levies, they were sent home. They were simply asked to go home and get the money before you enter. So, for that protection, just like how on page 37 under fundraising, that is Clause 77(2), which gives protection to the parents, students and teachers where if they do not want to be part of fundraising, they do not have to be. So similarly, that protection needs to be given to the most vulnerable families. If they are not able to pay the school levies, they should not be forced, intimidated, et cetera. In other words, we are just trying to protect vulnerable families. Those who can, they can pay. The same rule should not apply across the board.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move ahead and vote on the amendment suggested by the honourable Member.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Part 11.

Question put.

Part 11 agreed to.

Part 12 – Teacher Registration

Question put.

Part 12 agreed to.

Part 13 - Higher Education

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I will withdraw that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there any further amendment?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, on page 53, I move:

That Clause 129(c) be replaced with the following:

“Establish, continually update and ensure compliance with national standards embedded in the Fiji Qualifications Framework.”

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, instead of “establish national standards for different qualifications, that is replaced by the suggested amendment by honourable Usamate. Any comments?”

HON. J. USAMATE.- One of the important things that was developed by the various industry bodies in Fiji was to develop Fiji Qualifications - qualifications that are focused on the things that we need in our country.

Earlier today, the honourable Minister for Education was talking about tracing the graduates who were supported by TSLS. We noticed that only 47 percent of them, they could trace as being employed, the other 53 percent, they could not trace. I am not saying anything, I am just building up to what I am trying to say here. When the Qualifications Framework was set up, they were set up by industry bodies, like the welders, they would do the qualifications for welding. When you talk about carpenters, people who did that, they set those qualifications. So, they defined what Certificate I, Certificate II, Certificate III, Certificate IV, Certificate V, Diploma, et cetera, in carpentry means when they look at the way industries do their jobs in Fiji.

Now, you are seeing what is happening now, we are getting a lot of graduates not getting into jobs. One of the things that I am thinking in my mind, maybe it is because the way the qualifications

are defined is not benchmarked to what is required in the country. Fiji Qualifications Framework was set up basically to do that. You have standards set in the councils under the Fiji Higher Education Commission, and it is also their job to make sure that those standards are up to-date.

One of the things that I wanted to do here, is to peg, because one of the other problems that we have with the higher education institutes, they all want to make money by doing a lot of degrees and so forth, and sell it, for which there is no real need. We need to be able to match up where we are sending our money in terms of funding education to where the need is.

If we look at for instance, for the skills gap analysis that was done by FCEF, Fiji Human Resource Institute, Higher Education Commission of Fiji, and the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, it found that there has been a 11 percent growth in Fiji's labour force, but a 79 percent growth in foreign workers and high unemployment in our youth. So, there is a mismatch somewhere. To my mind, I had been thinking about it, the setting of standards for qualifications in the Fiji Qualifications Framework basically says, "you set these qualifications, things that are needed in this market."

If people provide those programmes, and we provide scholarships for those programmes, it means that we are addressing the needs in our market. For instance, in Fiji now, the big problem is skilled workers, people who can do. A lot of our people now come to education institutes, they can pass the exam, but they cannot do it. There is a problem in the way the qualifications have been, the minimum qualification requirements for qualifications established. I believe that Fiji Qualifications Framework, a lot of work has been done over the years, it needs to be updated and for us to make sure that all the training programmes being done in higher education institutes is targeting things that are needed – they need to be related to that Fiji Qualifications Framework.

In relation to this, there are other kinds of things that need to be done around this, and this is the whole issue for those of you in the training field, you know about competency-based assessment, the recognition of current competence. Some people do not have the paper, but they know how to do it. Now, building in all those kinds of frameworks, for me, I think this is very critical. If you are going to have a body like the Higher Education Commission of Fiji giving out money for particular programmes, you have to ensure it meets a real need in the country.

I believe that that should be reflected in the Fiji Qualifications Framework, and that is why I am pushing, this is the only amendment I am pushing because this is the one that I think is very critical to make sure that Government incentivises and spends money on programmes that directly impact on the kind of skills that people need. The thing about the steps that I said – 11 percent growth in Fiji's labour force, 79 percent in foreign workers, and high level of youth unemployment. There is something wrong there. Maybe we are throwing money at wrong places. That is why I am making this suggestion, Mr. Chairman.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, I needed to take this opportunity because I think honourable Usamate has failed to read the entirety of the section. Everything that he said is, perhaps, certainly not in paragraph (c), but it is from paragraph (a) to (k) - everything that he said in the last five to ten minutes. So, it is covered, and we need to go to a vote. I am proposing we go to a vote.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, (k) does not address what I am talking about, and I am talking about the *cava na yacana, sega ni veisotari* - absolute mismatch. I have worked in institutions, people like to do accounting degrees because it is easy to do, it is easy to get a piece of paper, but it is not the need. So we need to have a system of doing programmes and qualifications that reflect the need. The Fiji Qualifications Framework, these words need to go in there, because these are industry people setting what the requirements are, it is not some academic. You can do academics who can tell you how to pass an exam, but they cannot do it. So, I believe that the term

“Fiji Qualifications Framework” and all the data encompasses, which is understood by the Higher Education Commission of Fiji needs to be embedded there, so you make sure the qualifications are in tune with Fiji's needs.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I just make a clarification? Is there such a thing as Fiji Qualifications Framework? Does that exist in Fiji?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Under the Higher Education Commission of Fiji.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will proceed to a vote on honourable Usamate's amendment or suggested amendment to Subclause (c) in the place of “present established national standards for different qualifications”. He is suggesting established, continually update, and ensure compliance with national standards embedded in the Fiji Qualifications Framework.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Part 13.

Question put.

Part 13 agreed to.

Part 14 - General Powers

Question put.

Part 14 agreed to.

Part 15 – Offences and Penalties

Question put.

Part 15 agreed to.

Part 16 - Miscellaneous

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, page 65, I move:

That Clause 173(1) be amended by inserting the following after “home schools” as a new inclusion - “prescribing the procedures, requirements and other matters related to private schools.”

I have one more amendment. I move:

That Clause 173(3) be amended to include a new (b), and the new (b) should read, “procedures and requirements for professional development of teachers.”

Those are the two amendments, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Where would you suggest, honourable Kumar, where should it fit?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- On page 65, after (q).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The other amendment is a new (b) in Clause 173(3), on page 65. Let me get this right, honourable Premila Kumar, you would have a new (b) in the place of the old (b)?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am inserting a new (b), Sir. So, we just have to change the numbers.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, it is nothing to do with the types of schools, the first amendment.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, I have just heard what honourable Ro Tuisawau said, that it has nothing to do with the private school. If you had gone through the Bill, there is reference made to private school. There are four types of schools which you all have accepted. It is in the Bill. It also talks about how private schools will be run by having a school manager and whoever.

It does not mean my amendment is not in line with private school. I have just shown you how to change a Bill starting from definition to inclusion of different parts so that the whole private school conversation ends and it ends with regulations. So that is the provision that I have made. By having regulations, Mr. Chairman, it will simply provide the nitty-gritty as to how the private schools will be run.

Besides that, my other amendment is to set procedures and requirements for professional development. Again, on page 44, Clause 100(3)(b) makes reference to professional development which is part of a continuous improvement in knowledge and skills as the world evolves. Students, parents and employers' expectations change. It is important to develop regulations on professional development to make the teaching profession fit for purpose as we go along. It is for this reason, Mr. Chairman, I have included those two amendments.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think the suggestions made by honourable Premila Kumar make absolute sense because all throughout this Bill, it talks about private schools. We have decided not to include the definition et cetera, but somewhere, you need to be able to make regulations on how private schools will be run. So, if you are not going to put it into the mother legislation, you have got to find a place to put it here. Including this thing for making the provision to make regulations for private schools makes absolute sense because private schools is mentioned in the legislation, that is why I fully support it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now move to vote on the amendments as submitted by honourable Premila Kumar. There are two amendments in Clause 173(1) and Clause 173(3).

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Part 16.

Question put.

Part 16 agreed to.

Schedule

Question put.

Schedule agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Committee of the Whole Parliament. Parliament will now resume its meeting, and I shall resume the Chair.

The House resumed:

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the Third Reading of the Education Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34 of 2025).

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 88, I move:

That the Education Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34 of 2025), be read a third time and do pass.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today in my capacity as the Minister for Education to speak in strong support of the Education Bill 2025, which will modernise the education system by improving access, improving quality and equity for all learners. I understand the debate and I take note of the comments that have been made.

The Education Bill represents the most comprehensive reform of Fiji's education system since the Education Act 1966. It responds directly to the national vision articulated in the *Denarau Declaration* and reflects the voices of Fijians across all divisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a product of extensive nationwide consultation by both the Ministry of Education and the Standing Committee for Justice, Law and Human Rights. While the Ministry focused on our nine school districts, the Standing Committee took the consultation route a step further by taking the Education Bill to more rural, more remote and maritime areas all over Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current Education Act of 1966 is only 33 sections long, and the Education Bill of 2025 is more than five times the size with 175 clauses designed to address every facet of modern learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill gives full effect to the constitutional right to education. It establishes a comprehensive system that covers early childhood, primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and higher education ensuring that no Fijian is left behind at any stage of learning. Importantly, this Bill strengthens institutions that will drive quality and accountability.

The creation of the Education Advisory Council ensures broader stakeholder input into policy while the National Curriculum and Assessment Authority will guide curriculum standards, research and assessment. These are critical for raising the quality and the relevance of education in Fiji.

The Bill also reinforces professionalism in teaching by establishing and strengthening the Bill. The Fiji Teachers Registration Authority ensures that teachers meet proper standards and are supported in their development and are held to clear ethical expectations. This is essential, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for improving learning outcomes across the country. This legislation also promotes

inclusion. It makes provision for special and inclusive education and recognizes the need for mature students and expands access across all levels of education. It reflects our commitment to equity and lifelong learning for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to highlight the strong emphasis on student welfare. The Education Bill requires counselling services in schools, promotes safe learning environment and aligns with constitutional protections for children. These measures ensure that our schools are not only places of learning but also places of care and support. Another key strength of this Bill is its commitment to transparency and accountability. It introduces clear rules on school governance, financial management, audits and reporting. This will build greater public confidence in how schools are managed and funded.

The Standing Committee's work also stands out. It undertook wide public consultation, engaged stakeholders, and carefully considered all submissions. The ultimate result is a Bill that reflects the voices of our people and balances reform with our practical realities.

Finally, this Bill ensures alignment with national priorities through our international commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4, making the education system more responsive and equipped to meet future challenges. With these words, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Education Bill 2025 is a critical necessity for the operational function of the Ministry of Education.

It establishes clear legislative authority, and we need to ensure equitable, quality education for every student across our nation. This forward-looking, comprehensive legislation strengthens our educational institution, expands our access, and elevates our standards. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the motion, and I warmly urge every member of this August House to vote in absolute support of this Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Each speaker may speak up to 20 minutes, but be reminded that under Standing Order 88(2), that any debate must be confined to the question of whether the Bill should pass, not the content. The floor is now open.

HON. J. USAMATE. - Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the development of the Bill has been a great exercise, and the participation of the members of the Committee and the staff of the Ministry, who I can see are sitting at the back there, have been giving advice all along.

The question of the usefulness of the Bill is not in question. Most of the things that are there are virtually 100 percent of it is good. It is a pity that we could not set aside our political differences and listen to some of the observations that were coming from this end. I think if we have been able to do that, we could have made it better than what we would agree to today. So, we agree in general, Sir, but we might be voting no because there are several provisions. If we had put it in, it would have become 100 percent. This one is still 95.5 percent, and the people from...

MR. SPEAKER. - Almost touching the contents there.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ. - Honourable Speaker. I would like to take this time to thank the drafters of the Bill and the agency that came up with this education reform Bill. Indeed, comprehensive work has been carried out. I would like to thank all the staff of the ministry, the Minister, and the Standing Committee. They have done a marvelous job in scrutinising and bringing all the amendments that have been brought to the amended Bill that is before us.

The only thing, Mr. Speaker, that I would say is education was free in this country all this

while. Bringing levies is not something that we would have actually wanted, but unfortunately, it is part of the Bill, something that we should have actually gotten rid of because it will be something that will burden our parents and students as well. For that particular reason, on one side, while we support the reform, putting levies and extra burden on the parents is not welcome. That is all I wanted to say.

MR. SPEAKER. – Since there are no other volunteers who want to speak, I will call the honourable Minister to exercise his right to reply.

HON. A. M. RADRODRO. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know it is late into the night. I would just like to thank the honourable Members on the other side for the very lively interjections that they put into the Bills. However, we take into consideration every issue that you had highlighted. Some of them are there, especially the definition of a private school.

You should know, honourable Members, that private schools are owned by controlling authorities, faith-based organisations and management schools. The only difference, maybe you are looking at is probably those that have been funded by the Government and those that are not funded by Government. However, thank you very much for the support, and we hope that we can all move together in ensuring that this Bill works.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast

Ayes	-	38
Noes	-	14
Not Voted	-	3

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to give effect to the constitutional right to education and for related matters, Bill No. 34 of 2025, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No..... of 2026)]

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI PUBLIC TRUSTEES CORPORATION
PTE LIMITED 2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move;

That Parliament debates the Review Report on Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Pte Limited 2020 Annual Report that was tabled on 28th April 2026.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Pte Limited (FPTCL) was corporatised in April 2006, transforming into a public enterprise to offer professional Estate, Will and Trust services for Fijians. A significant shift occurred in 2006 when the office was corporatised into Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Pte Limited, aiming to modernise service delivery and become a more efficient public enterprise.

The Committee, in its deliberations, highlighted the following recommendations:

Recommendation No. 1

The Committee recommends that the FPTCL must continue to provide beneficiaries with its mandated services and create more nationwide awareness.

Recommendation No. 2

The Committee recommends that FPTCL must continue to invest in sustainable and profitable business.

Recommendation No. 3

The Committee recommends that there should be a more efficient dispute resolution system by FPTCL in consultation with legal entities, like the Registrar of Titles and the Office of Registrar General.

Recommendation No. 4

The Committee recommends that FPTCL must review the Fiji Public Service Act 2006 to align and address the current challenges it faces.

Recommendation No. 5

The Committee recommends the urgent need to strengthen coordination between FPTCL and the Ministry of Justice, to improve the timely transfer of documents and titles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee concludes that FPTCL is providing its mandatory service by serving the beneficiaries to ensure their financial sustainability and further contributes towards national development. The Committee trusts that the recommendation outlined will support FPTCL in achieving its strategic objective and enhancing its service towards its beneficiaries.

On that note, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the Motion. I have a list of speakers with me. Each speaker has five minutes to deliver his or her contribution.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to speak on the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the 2020 Fiji Public Trust Cooperation Pte Limited Annual Report. As a member of the Committee who participated in our deliberations, I want to begin by thanking our Chairman and all the Committee Members for their hard work.

Also, I want to thank the Chief Executive Officer and the 30 dedicated staff members of the Corporation. They manage an immense workload, looking after an estate value of \$51 million and serving over 11,000 beneficiaries across our nation. They do all of this without receiving a single dollar in financial grants from the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these workers deserve our true appreciation for keeping this organisation afloat under very difficult financial conditions, but we must look closely at the serious operational challenges hidden in this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we see the same painful issues over and over again in our communities regarding property transfers after death. This is where the delays truly hurt ordinary people. Thousands of families across Fiji need their services during their most difficult moments. When a loved one passes away, the family is already grieving. Instead of finding smooth relief, they get trapped in a bureaucratic nightmare just trying to transfer their titles or clear properties. When the system works well, it provides immediate security and peace of mind to a grieving family.

That is the positive side we want to see but, when it fails, properties are left in limbo for years, family members end up in bitter disputes, and assets are wasted while waiting for a simple title transfer or delayed will search. This Report is a loud warning to this argument.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the corporation is facing a massive financial crisis because its core revenue from the Fiji National Provident Fund Minor Trust is completely depleted. The funds are running out because of legislative changes, and very soon, this business will be completely gone. We cannot fix a 20-year-old problem with slow discussions of political arguments. We must act immediately to upgrade their outdated records management system. We need to address the urgent need for equipment, proper institutional development, team training, and thoroughly testing everything before implementation. Without these essential tools, we are failing our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the recommendations of this Report because our ordinary Fijians deserve better. We cannot afford to let down the thousands of beneficiaries who rely on this institution for their livelihood and peace of mind. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report - 2020 Annual Report of Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Pte Limited. At the outset, I acknowledge the work of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in conducting the review and site visits, and for the recommendations that have been put forward to strengthen the operations of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation. I also commend the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation for the important work it continues to undertake in serving the people of Fiji.

The Committee's findings clearly demonstrate the important role that the organisation plays in protecting the interests of beneficiaries, vulnerable persons, and families throughout Fiji. The report notes that during the review period, the Corporation managed an estate value of about \$51 million, registered 4,547 Wills, and administered 1,897 deceased estates for more than 11,000 beneficiaries. These figures reflect the scale and significance of the Corporation's responsibility within Fiji's justice and state administration framework.

The Committee also acknowledges the Corporation's efforts in providing estate planning, legal services, trust administration, and estate management services throughout Fiji. These services are critical in ensuring families are supported during difficult times, and that beneficiaries' interests are protected through proper legal and administrative processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also highlight that the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation operates as a self-funded statutory organisation and does not receive government grants or direct funding support. Despite operating independently, the Corporation has continued to remain financially sustainable and has contributed over \$5.6 million in dividends to government to date. This is a significant achievement and reflects crucial management and operational resilience.

A further note is that the Corporation currently administers over 1,265 estates and 6,908 trust funds, with a combined portfolio value of about \$94.5 million, while also safeguarding more than 5,300 Wills and trusts under its care. These responsibilities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, continue to expand as public awareness and demand for trustees and estate services increased throughout the count.

I acknowledge the Committee's recommendation regarding the urgent need to strengthen the coordination between the organisation and the Ministry of Justice to improve the timely transfer of documents and titles.

I wish to inform this august House that ongoing engagements and consultations have already taken place between the Ministry of Justice, the Registrar of Titles and the Registrar General's Office

and the organisation to address operational delays affecting estate administration processes. These discussions have focused on improving turnaround time for probate matters, title searches, transfer documentation and inter-agency coordination.

Meetings were held throughout 2005 and this year to address these operational issues and strengthen collaboration between agencies involved in estate administration and legal processes. One of the major challenges identified by both the Committee and the organisation relates to delays in probate processes, title processing and beneficiary disputes.

These are often complex matters involving multiple family members, legal requirements, and related administration procedures. The Ministry recognises these challenges and will continue to work closely with all relevant stakeholders to improve efficiency and service delivery outcomes for the people of Fiji. I also note the public's recommendation regarding the review of the Public Trustee Cooperation Act 2006.

I wish to inform this august House that Corporation has already commenced initial consultations and preparatory work towards reviewing the Act, fees, charges and regulations in 2008.

Staff consultations have already been undertaken and the Ministry, together with the Solicitor-General's Office, will continue to support the legislative review process to ensure the legal framework remains modern, effective and aligned with current operational requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also commend the organisation for its continued investment in digital transformation and operational modernisation. Implementation of the five-hole document management system and the recently completed trust administration co-op accounting system has significantly improved records management, operational efficiency and safeguarding of sensitive beneficiary information. These investments strengthen governance, improve transparency and ensure continuity of services, particularly during emergencies and natural disasters.

The Ministry of Justice fully supports the continued collaboration with the organisation to strengthen governance, improve operational coordination and enhance access to trustee and State administration services for futures.

I commend the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its comprehensive review and recommendations, and I acknowledge the ongoing efforts made by the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited in serving beneficiaries and families throughout Fiji.

With those remarks, I support the motion before the House.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Social Affairs Committee for this report. The most important issue emerging is the serious lack of public awareness about the role and services of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited. Many ordinary Fijians still do not fully understand the importance of making a Will, nor do they fully appreciate the protective role that the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation can play in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for many families, making a Will is still perceived as something only for the wealthy, something to be considered later in life or a service available only through private lawyers at high cost. As a result, many Fijians delay making Wills altogether, or without understanding the repercussions, they transfer their home, land, savings, and other assets to children or relatives out of love, trust, emotional pressure, or even coercion. We are increasingly hearing painful stories of elderly parents who, after transferring their assets, later face neglect, financial hardship, or abuse by their own family members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is becoming a serious social challenge in Fiji, resulting in family conflicts and increasing financial insecurity among retirees and vulnerable citizens. We must ask:

- Why is the FPTCL not being recognised and promoted as an essential State institution for social protection?
- Why is it that many Fijians are still not aware that the FPTCL can assist them in preparing Wills, safely storing those Wills, and supporting families after a loved one passes away, and protecting vulnerable people from disputes, exploitation, and unnecessary hardship?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, institutions like the FPTCL should not be viewed merely as an administrative office dealing with estates. They are part of the social safety net of this country. Just as we recognise the importance of FNPF in protecting retirement income, we must also recognise the importance of Fiji Public Trustee in protecting family assets, dignity, and the wishes of vulnerable citizens after death.

There is an urgent need for stronger public education and outreach, not only by the FPTCL, but also by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection, and other Ministries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). If the Government is serious about protecting vulnerable citizens, retirees, widows, children, and persons living in rural and maritime communities, then the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation must be strengthened, modernised, and treated as an important public service institution, not simply another State-owned entity struggling to survive on limited resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite limited resources and without a direct Government grant, the Fiji Public Trustee continues to manage more than 11,000 beneficiaries and tens of millions of dollars in estate assets. That reflects commitment and resilience, but resilience alone cannot sustain an institution carrying such an important social responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the biggest challenges families face after the death of a loved one is simply finding out whether a Will exists. Why should grieving families have to move between the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation, the courts, and the Registrar of Titles just to trace documents and assets? For many ordinary Fijians, especially in rural and maritime areas, this process is costly and stressful.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we need is a single integrated digital Will registry and online Will-making services as a one-stop shop so that Fijians can access these services more easily, quickly, and cost-effectively.

The report also highlights disputes between beneficiaries where one uncooperative person can delay the whole estate settlement, and this issue needs to be addressed when the Act is being reviewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also note concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of the Fiji Public Trustee, particularly after the loss of FNPF-related trust businesses. Government cannot continue expecting this institution to provide essential social services while its revenue base is decreasing. A clear five-year sustainability and modernisation plan should be developed by the board, including the expansion into new services and revenue streams.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Public Trustee is an essential institution for Fiji, but if we fail to modernise its system and fail to support it financially, then the vulnerable Fijians will be left without a guardian, their assets mismanaged or lost, and their rights undefended when they need protection most.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2020 Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited Annual Report.

At the outset, I commend the board management and staff of Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited for their dedication and resilience during one of the most difficult periods in our nation's history. Year 2020 was the year overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainties, lockdowns and social hardship. Yet, despite these challenges, the corporation continued to provide critical trustee, estate and legal services to the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the corporation plays a very important role in safeguarding the interests of ordinary Fijians. Its core responsibility is to provide estate planning, administrative services, trust services and legal services in accordance with the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Act 2006. These are not merely administrative functions. They involve protecting families, ensuring transparency in the management of estates, assessing vulnerable beneficiaries and providing legal certainty for future generations. These responsibilities are closely linked to fairness, accountability and access to justice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most commendable aspects of this report is the Corporation's continued commitment to service delivery despite the difficult economic environment. During 2020, the Corporation accepted 45 new estates valued at \$10.8 million compared to 33 estates valued at \$7.8 million in 2019.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Corporation administered 701 trusts and managed over 1,800 deceased estates benefiting more than 11,000 beneficiaries throughout Fiji. These figures clearly demonstrate the growing importance of the services provided by Fiji Public Trustee Corporation. It reflects the confidence that the Fijians continue to place in this institution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the Corporation's efforts in improving accessibility and inclusiveness. The Report highlights that more than 10,000 fees and charges were waived for elderly clients under its non-commercial obligation services. This is an important reminder that public enterprises are not solely profit-driven institutions. They also carry social responsibilities to ensure that vulnerable members of our communities are not left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to note that the Corporation continued to innovate and adapt during the pandemic. Despite restrictions and disruptions, four new services were introduced in 2020, Family Trust, Charitable Trust, Prepaid Funeral Trust, and Power of Attorney. These initiatives show the Corporation's willingness to modernise its service offering and respond to the evolving needs of Fijians.

In today's environment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, estate planning and trust administration are becoming increasingly important as families seek financial security and legal protection for their assets and loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another significant achievement of the Corporation is securing its first conservation trust involving the administration of 512-acre freehold property containing indigenous plants and animal species. This demonstrates that trustee services are not only relevant to individuals or families but also to environmental protection and sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while acknowledging these positive achievements, it is also important that we honestly reflect on the challenges identified in the report. The Corporation recorded operating loss of \$72,000 in 2020 compared to an operating profit of \$652,000 in 2019. However, this decline must be viewed within the context of the global pandemic, which negatively affected investment and financial markets. Despite this, the Corporation maintained a strong balance sheet and a sound cash

flow of over \$574,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe there is still room for broader public legal education in this area. We must continue encouraging Fijians to prepare Wills, understand their legal rights and protect interest on their families and children. I wish to commend the Corporation for embracing technology and digital transformation during the pandemic. The Report outlines the use of online services, virtual meetings, social engagements, and document management systems to ensure continuity of operation. The adaptability helps maintain services even during lockdowns and movement restrictions. Their professionalism and commitment ensure that Fijians continue to receive critical services during uncertain times.

The Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Pte Limited remains an important institution in protecting the legal, financial, and social interests of the people. The 2020 Annual Report demonstrates resilience, innovation, and commitment to public service despite extraordinary challenges. With these few words, I commend the Report to Parliament.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the positive contributions made by honourable Members during the debate on the Review Report on the Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Pte Limited 2020 Annual Report. I take this opportunity to thank the Board members, the Chief Executive Officer, and the staff of Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Limited, for their usual commitment, dedication, and support provided to the beneficiaries.

On that note, Sir, I commend this motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question out.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF FIJI 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move;

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji's 2024 Annual Report, which was tabled on 28th April, 2026.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji is a statutory body established by the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Act 1979. Apart from providing regulatory oversight for domestic civil aviation and fulfilling international air safety obligations, it also owns and manages Nadi International Airport, Nausori Airport, and 22 small domestic airports all around Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reorganisation of CAAF, facilitated by the Civil Aviation Reform Act 1999, separated CAAF's regulatory role from its commercial operations, while the commercial responsibilities and assets were transferred to Airports Fiji Limited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, CAAF oversees the activities of airport operators, air traffic control and air navigation service providers, aircraft operators, managing a housing estate and other properties.

The Committee, in its deliberations, highlighted the following recommendations that CAAF must -

- (1) maintain its safety standard obligation under ICAO.
- (2) continue to engage with Government to show how it can increase its share of Departure Tax.
- (3) liaise with relevant stakeholders to fast-track its legislative changes and ensure that it is aligned with ICAO standards and modern regulatory best practices.
- (4) review its remuneration package to attract more qualified staff to work in the aviation industry.
- (5) monitor all unregistered airdromes in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee concludes that the overall performance of CAAF demonstrates its sound governance and proactive responses to ICAO findings and aligns with national aviation priorities. The Committee trusts that the recommendations outlined will support CAAF in achieving its strategic objective and improving its ability to meet statutory and international obligations.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the Motion. I have a list of speakers. Each speaker has five minutes for his or her contribution.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this time to thank you for allowing me to speak today on the Review Report on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2024 Annual Report.

As a member of the Standing Committee, it is an honour to present our findings and contribute to the discussion on this important Report. I want to thank our Chairperson and fellow Committee members for their dedication during this review.

We must highly praise the Chief Executive Officer and the dedicated staff of the Authority. The Authority achieved a clean audit opinion, showing great transparency and successfully maintained an international safety rating of 76 percent under the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme.

The Report also highlights the opening of the new International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Office in Fiji, as a major milestone that positions Fiji as a regional hub. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these achievements deserve our true appreciation.

Mr. Speaker, while we celebrate these successes, the Report also outlines serious funding and operational challenges. The Committee noted the shifting of financial structures for this vital Authority, including its reliance on a \$5 share from the passenger Departure Tax. Managing a national budget comes with major challenges, and we all understand that Government funds must be balanced across many competing sectors. This is not about picking a political fight or looking backwards - it is about working together to ensure our aviation infrastructure remains strong and sustainable, so we must focus entirely on the practical solutions needed today.

The Report details the exact operational realities on the ground. The Authority currently certifies 22 aerodromes nationwide, with 15 managed by the Government and seven in privately operated facilities. However, our Committee identified a major safety risk regarding completely unregistered aerodromes that require closure and continuous monitoring.

Furthermore, the Authority is facing severe technical braindrain and critical staffing challenges because current remuneration packages are completely uncompetitive against the overseas market. Our local talent is leaving.

In addition, the Report highlights that land acquired by the Authority in Wailoaloa for major developments remains paralysed because it is partly occupied by tenants and is stuck before the court. To resolve these blockages, the Report provides clear practical recommendations.

We need faster progress by consolidating our aviation legislation into a single modern framework, aligning with international standards. We also recommend further engagement with the Government to explore increasing the passenger Departure Tax to secure stable funding. We need to focus on the basics of addressing the urgent need for equipment, proper institutional development, extensive team training, and thoroughly testing it before implementation. Without these essential tools, we cannot maintain our high safety standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the recommendations of this Report because our citizens deserve a safe and reliable aviation network.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji's 2024 Annual Report, which was tabled in this august House on 28th April, 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Report provides an important assessment of the performance of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) for the year ending 31st December, 2024, and highlights the Authority's continued commitment to ensuring a safe, secure, and efficient aviation system for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, aviation in Fiji is more than a regulatory function - it is a lifeline to our economy, a driver of tourism, a facility that will create a critical pillar of national resilience. A safe, secure and efficient aviation system underpins Fiji's connectivity to the world and our standing as a trusted destination. Fiji's effective implementation rating for the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) remains above global and regional averages, reflecting the strength of our aviation safety oversight and our position as a leading performer among Small Island Developing States in the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to highlight that Fiji's aviation system continues to deliver strong safety outcomes. For the past several years, we have recorded no fatalities in aircraft accident. This is a clear and powerful reflection of the strength of our aviation safety oversight framework. This record is not by chance - it speaks to the robustness of our regulatory systems and the consistency of oversight applied across the aviation sector. This is a strong foundation, but not our end point.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2024 financial year represents a transformational milestone for CAAF, marking its 45th anniversary and a renewed organisational identity under the theme, 'Safe Skies, Secure Fiji'. The Authority continues to fulfil its statutory mandate under the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Act 1979, ensuring the safety, security and regulatory oversight of Fiji's aviation sector, aligned with international standards set by ICAO.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Report highlights several significant achievements that reflect the continued progress and strengthening of CAAF. Foremost among these is Fiji's growing regional leadership in aviation.

The establishment of the ICAO Pacific Small Developing States Liaison Office in Nadi in 2023, represents far more than the opening of a physical office - it is a clear recognition of Fiji's credibility and leadership within the Pacific community. This development positions our country as a regional hub for safety and security oversight, a centre for training and technical cooperation, and a platform from which aviation standards across the region can be shaped. In an inclusively interconnected and competitive global environment, this significantly enhances Fiji's voice, influence, and strategic relevance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this progress is supported by strong governance and a firm commitment to accountability. The Authority has maintained a consistent and clean audit account and retained its ISO certification, underscoring its adherence to high standards and effective quality management systems. The level of discipline provides ongoing confidence in the Authority's institutional integrity and operational reliability.

In addition, CAAF has delivered a strong financial performance during the past year under review. The Authority recorded significant growth in income and a return to surplus, reflecting prudent fiscal management and the strengthening of its revenue streams. This financial stability is essential in supporting its regulatory mandate and future development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Authority has also made important strides in modernisation through digital transformation efforts. Major improvements in information and communication technology, including the migration to cloud-based systems and the introduction of a modernised website, will enhance online services by improving efficiency, accessibility, and service delivery across the aviation sector.

Furthermore, the Authority continues to invest in its most valuable assets — its people. Workforce stability and capability have been strengthened through improved staff retention and sustained investment in training and professional development. This ensures that Fiji maintains a skilled and competent workforce capable of meeting the evolving demands of the aviation industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Report also highlights progress in strengthening Fiji's aviation legal and regulatory framework. Ongoing reforms are aimed at modernising legislation, enhancing aviation security provisions, and aligning national regulations with international best practices. Sir, CAAF continues to contribute to broader national policy frameworks, particularly, in areas of security and disaster preparedness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Review Report affirms that CAAF is a resilient and forward-looking regulator, playing a critical role in safeguarding Fiji's aviation system and supporting national development. I commend the motion to this House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me take this opportunity to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Review Report on Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2024 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think a lot has been covered already, but in short, there are some key findings that the Committee has come up with which are actually quite impressive to see. In terms of implementing what it needs to do with respect to safety oversight, et cetera, CAAF has effectively implemented about 76 percent, but I think it may be more at the moment, of its obligations that it has under the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme which the Committee picked and rightfully pointed out.

There are some challenges that CAAF has that everyone needs to take notice of, especially

with respect to us losing a lot of qualified staff. At the moment, we have a great Chief Executive Officer (CEO) there, Ms. Levestam, who has done a phenomenal job, but we need to ensure that we really put the thinking cap on with respect to how we can actually retain these greatly trained people who are sitting at CAAF. It is a very funny kind of institution that requires very highly qualified people to be sitting there, but our people are big targets when they are being taken by other jurisdictions, especially around the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the issues that they raised was in regard to a property that was purchased by CAAF in Wailoaloa which is still sitting idle. I am not sure what had happened to it, but we really need to know a little bit more about it. Wailoaloa is a hotspot when it comes to tourism.

Some of the recommendations that they have come up with are quite important for us to ponder on and for Government to, perhaps, think about. A larger portion of the Departure Tax is going to CAAF because of its operational expenses, which is something that, I think, the Government needs to look at, and as I have said, about the package.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think one of the major issues that is being dealt with currently is the legislation. I know the review is going on because effectively, CAAF is run by three different moving parts or three legislations – the Civil Aviation Authority Fiji Act 1979, Air Navigation Regulations (ANR) and the Civil Aviation Security Act. I know the honourable Minister and CAAF have been hard at work trying to do the review, but it is best that it is done comprehensively and brought in line with our ICAO obligations and what we need to do to keep us as a very safe destination with respect to air travel.

To supplement also the Act and the regulations, I think there are some other issues that CAAF deals with in terms of standard guidance documents, et cetera, that they have, and all of those needed to be upgraded. So, they are in a space, at the moment, where a lot of upgrade is needed, but we need to retain the staff to actually do it. All in all, Mr. Speaker, I think CAAF has done a phenomenal job. However, we must not rush this legislation through. We must go through it with a fine-tooth comb because you are talking about air safety and making sure that we have the right laws in place, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, CAAF also has issues, at the moment, because it heavily regulates unmanned vehicles and these are the things that we need to ensure that we get the regulations right. I think these things were not actually picked, but the only issue that was picked was unregistered airdromes. It is not a big issue, it is a smaller issuer, but it is something that needs to be corrected and the laws need to be made with respect to making sure that they are all registered and properly done.

I commend the honourable Minister and his hardworking Team at CAAF, who have kept us up to speed and kept us safe with respect to the airspace around Fiji. I thank you.

HON. F.W.R VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, tonight, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report on the on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2024 Annual Report. It also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on where we stand in one of the most strategic sectors that we have in Fiji, and also to chart a worthy course of the challenges and the opportunities at CAAF and for us as a country.

The 2024 Annual Report reveals a story of resilience and quiet professionalism. Mr. Speaker, Sir, CAAF delivered a strong financial turnaround from a loss of over \$600,000 the previous year, recording a net surplus of \$3.8 million, a very significant improvement from the previous year.

Safety and regulatory performances remain robust with high compliance rates across

airworthiness, flight operations and personnel licensing. The Authority successfully resolved multiple legal cases that were noted by the Committee, enhanced the oversight of its operation and continued to certify airdromes and service providers to international standards.

These results, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are important for us because aviation is not merely transport. For a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) like Fiji, it is an economic lifeblood, national connectivity, as well as a bridge of Fiji to the world. It supports over 50,000 jobs and contributes nearly 22 percent to our GDP when multiplier effects are considered.

In 2024, Mr. Speaker, despite global turbulence, CAAF helped keep our skies safe and our tourism engine running. The global aviation landscape is undergoing a very profound structural change. Geopolitical tension, supply chain fragility, rising fuel costs and the accelerated climate crisis are not distant risks for us. They are present realities, reshaping our operating environment.

In Fiji, Mr. Speaker, these forces are ever more magnified. We sit in the front line of climate change, more intense cyclones, rising seas and volatile weather patterns that threaten both, infrastructure, as well as flight reliability.

We also face the classic small island dilemma - a high dependence on imported fuel for our jets and tourism markets that can shift rapidly with global sentiments. This is the tragedy of the horizon that is playing out in the skies. Decisions we make or fail to make today, Mr. Speaker, will determine whether the Fiji aviation sector becomes a source of enduring strength or growing vulnerability. What must we do? We must -

- embed long-term resilience into every layer of aviation governance, and the Committee had picked up on that.
- treat digital transformation and skills development as a national and company priority.
- diversify. While tourism remains vital, we should position as we have, as a more resilient Pacific aviation hub, supporting regional connectivity, emergency response and even humanitarian logistics across our Blue Pacific Continent.
- have a strong institution. Mr. Speaker, CAAF has, indeed, over the years, shown progress in sound financial management and good regulatory oversight.

Fiji has natural resources, Mr. Speaker, Sir, geographical advantage and the human spirit, coupled with our *bula* smile that can sustain Pacific aviation, but leadership requires deliberate choice to invest in safety, to price risk correctly, to align policies with the realities of a changing climate and a fragmenting global order.

With the recommendations from the Committee, let us ensure here at Parliament that Fiji's aviation sector does not simply recover from shocks, but emerges stronger, cleaner and more connected, carrying our people, improving our economy and our Pacific values forward towards more confidence in the future.

MR. SPEAKER.- That was the last of our contributions to the motion, and I will call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee to speak in reply.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the positive contributions by honourable Members during this debate on the Review Report on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2024 Annual Report.

Sir, I take this opportunity to thank the Board members, the Chief Executive Officer and the staff of CAAF for their commitment, dedication, and unwavering support towards the successful operation of the aviation industry in Fiji.

On that note, Sir, I fully support the motion before the House. Thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI NATIONAL PROVIDENT FUND 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. I.S. VANAWALU. - Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the review report on the Fiji National Provident Fund 2025 Annual Report that was tabled on 28th April, 2026.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National Provident Fund was established in 1966 under the pre-independence government and will be celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

The operations of the Fund is guided by the FNPF Act 2011. The Fiji National Provident Fund is a defined contribution fund that provides superannuation services to its members. Hence, FNPF is mandated by law to collect compulsory contributions from employees and employers towards the retirement savings of all its workers in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNPF is a major investor in Fiji and is one of the country's largest property owners. The Fund owns majority shares in Amalgamated Telecom Holdings Pte Ltd, Vodafone Fiji Ltd, Home Finance Company Pte Ltd, and fully owns Intercontinental Fiji Golf Resort and Spa, Natadola Bay Golf Course, the Yatule Resort and Spa, Natadola Beach, Holiday Inn in Suva, Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay, Sheraton Fiji Resort, Westin Resort, Denarau Golf and Racquet Club, and the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, in its deliberations, highlighted the following recommendations:

Recommendation No. 1

The Committee recommends that FNPF must continue to increase its revenue collection by exploring more investment opportunities.

Recommendation No. 2

The Committee recommends that the FNPF must continue to engage with the Reserve Bank of Fiji to increase offshore investment limits for better return of its members.

Recommendation No. 3

The Committee recommends that the FNPF must fast-track its processes in reviewing the FNPF Act to align with modern standards and business best practices.

Recommendation No. 4

The Committee recommends that the FNPF must prioritise employer training on its portal, ensuring accurate submission of information to members' accounts.

Recommendation No. 5

The Committee recommends that the FNPF, together with the aligned ministries, must provide a detailed report clearly outlining changes in their project costs and delays in the completion of the Westin Hotel.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the committee recommends that the FNPF, through its continued commitment towards members' welfare, financial sustainability, and contribution towards national development, the committee further entrusts that the recommendations outlined in the report will support the FNPF in achieving its objective by providing more efficient service to its members. On that note, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the Motion. I have a list of speakers with me. Each of our speakers has 10 minutes to make his or her contribution.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver a brief response to the 2025 National Provident Fund Annual Report. Let me begin with a statement of fact and not politics. The FNPF is a \$12.1 billion of Fijian workers' money, 436,860 members, nearly every employed Fijian, 35 percent of our financial system and 85 percent of our GDP in balance sheet terms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the FNPF succeeds, a nurse in Labasa retires with dignity, a taxi driver in Nausori leaves a home for his children, and a seasonal worker's savings outlive inflation. When the FNPF fails, the entire country feels it. Today, I will speak plainly, I will acknowledge the Fund's genuine achievements and will name the Government's failures in this Report.

What works and why it matters for the members and Fiji: Revenue grew from \$909 million to \$1.1 billion. Dividend income rose from \$148.8 million to \$190.4 million. The Committee found three clusters of concern:

(1) Offshore investment restrictions (finding 3.4)

The Fund's offshore portfolio grew to \$1.1 billion. However, the Reserve Bank of Fiji approved only \$100 million to be transferred overseas. The CEO confirmed this as a challenge every year for them. Impact – the members lose diversification. The BSP-PNG investment pays Australian dollar dividends and strong returns, but the Fund cannot increase its stake. It is forced to keep 91 percent of its shares in Fiji, a small cyclone-prone economy. That concentration is a long-term risk.

(2) Suspense accounts (finding 3.7)

Unidentified contribution fell from \$15.5 million to \$4.3 million. Progress, but \$4.3 million is still trapped. Those are thousands of workers, whose money never reached their account. Impact – every dollar in Suspense is a family loss of medical treatment, a child's delayed school fee, a retirement shortfall, trust erodes when workers ask, "Where is my money?"

(3) The Westin Hotel delays and cost (finding 3.8)

The Committee was assured of the completion by April 2026.

However, the Report reveals a troubling gap. I asked the management in the Committee meeting what was the initial cost? I did mention to them, because I recall at one point in time when

it was mentioned, it was around \$90 million. The answer from the management was that it was not correct. The last time we were told, the cost had increased to \$230 million. That is a \$156 million increase from the original public figure.

I really do not know what the cost to date would be. A fiberglass swimming pool was purchased. It may not be used, but the CEO could not answer on the day. Impact on that is delayed revenue from the hotel means delayed dividends to the members. Cost overruns reduce overall returns, and the lack of transparency damages public confidence.

Board appointment and the Westin warning signs: Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me speak directly about governance. The FNPF Board is appointed by the Minister for Finance under the Fiji National Provident Fund Act. The Minister chooses a chairperson and six other members. Most of us are aware that in recent days, we have heard one of the Board Members has been removed.

We also hear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there are a lot of differences between the Board Members and the management level. It is a serious issue and I request the line Minister to address this. Look at the Westin project, three warning signs that would trigger the immediate actions elsewhere.

I am also reliably told that within the shortest period of time, three to four Project Managers have been changed. What is going on? I mean, what is wrong?

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

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- There are various Points of Orders here which are relevant – 60, paragraph one, which must be relevant, 61 - member must not impute improper motives. So these are the shenanigans going on, we are going on to 11.00 p.m. He brings up issues which are totally unrelated to the report. Just focus on the recommendation. You started off well and then deteriorated.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bala, can you keep to your original.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am very much within the report that is in front of us.

Warning three, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the completion date has slipped multiple times. The Board assured the Committee of April 2026. We are now in late May 2026. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought the completion time was April 2027, so I had to go back and recheck. So, when I checked the very time, it says April, 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not calling for hats to roll today. We are calling for answers, audits and accountability. Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall, why does Reserve Bank of Fiji keep FNPF's annual offshore investment transfer at only \$100 million when the Fund has demonstrated superior returns from offshore assets, including BSP-PNG dividends paid in Australian dollars? And when 91% of the portfolio remains domestic, well within prudent diversification limits.

Mr. Speaker, we are not all here to destroy the FNPF. We are here to protect it from itself. The fund is too big to fail. It holds the life savings of every Fijian who works for a wage. So, we say, celebrate \$1.1 billion in revenue. Celebrate the 8.75 percent interest, but do not celebrate the Westin cost overrun. Do not celebrate the suspense account.

Mr. Speaker Sir, may I also ask the line Minister, what was the exact approved budget for The Westin renovation at the time of the board's final investment decision? And what is the total actual expenditure to date? Broken down by phase, contractor payments, variation orders, and any return of assets, including the unused swimming pool. Our stance is simple. If I was wrong in doing that swimming pool, honourable Member, take me to court. Do not just shout here for nothing. You are not the Speaker. Our stance is simple, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We support the fund's success. We question the Board's transparency. We demand accountability for the Westin project.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion on the review of the 2025 Annual Report of the Fiji National Provident Fund. At the outset, I wish to congratulate or acknowledge the Chairperson and the members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the work undertaken in scrutinising this report and engaging extensively with the officials of FNPF. I also acknowledge the Chief Executive Officer and the management team of FNPF for their transparency and willingness to provide detailed responses during the public consultations and Committee hearings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National Provident Fund remains one of the most important institutions in our country. It is not merely a retirement fund. It is a pillar of national development, economic resilience, and social security for the people of Fiji. The report highlights that FNPF now serves more than 436,000 members, with total assets reaching approximately \$12.1 billion and members' funds standing at \$9.5 billion. These are significant figures because they reflect the trust that ordinary Fijians place in the fund to safeguard their future. Every worker, every employer contribution, and every investment decision carry with it the hopes of families throughout our beloved nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the major achievements noted in the report is the Fund's strong financial performance during the 2025 financial year. The Committee highlighted that revenue collection increased to approximately \$1.1 billion compared to \$909 million in 2024, driven by diversified investment. This growth demonstrates prudent financial management, disciplined investment strategies, and commitment to long-term sustainability. I also commend the fund for maintaining operational expenditure at around \$63 million despite increasing service demands and surging prices. This shows responsible governance and effective cost management practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I particularly welcome the Fund's strategic investment in key areas of our economy. These include tourism, telecommunications, banking, healthcare, infrastructure, and offshore investment portfolios. The report clearly outlines investment in BSP-PNG, the S&P 500 Exchange Trade Fund, Martin Currie funds, and other international portfolios. These investments are important because diversification strengthens the Fund's resilience and creates better returns for the members over the long term. At the same time, domestic investment continues to stimulate employment, business growth, and economic activity within Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee also recognises major milestone projects undertaken by FNPF, including partnership with Google for an ICT facility in Natadola, strategic development, and investment in healthcare infrastructure. These initiatives are helping position Fiji as a regional hub in technology services and tourism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I see these investments are well aligned with our Government's broader vision of creating a modern, diversified, and resilient economy. Investment in infrastructure and innovation creates opportunities not only for businesses but also for young people, entrepreneurs, and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight the importance of the fund's support for Sustainable Development Goals. The report outlines contributions towards good health, quality education, decent work, innovation, and strong institutions.

The partial withdrawal assistance for education and medical purposes has assisted many Fijian families during difficult times. Likewise, the voluntary membership initiatives targeting farmers, domestic workers, and informal sector workers are commendable steps towards financial inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the Report recognises many achievements, it also identifies important challenges and recommendations that deserve close attention.

The Committee raised concerns regarding delays in the review of the FNPF Act. As lawmakers and custodians of public trust, we must ensure that legislation governing such an important institution remains modern, responsive, and aligned with evolving economic realities. The world is changing rapidly — digital finance aligned with the evolving economic realities. The world is changing rapidly. Digital finance, offshore investment, mechanisation, labour mobility and retirement expectations are all evolving. Therefore, the review of the FNPF Act must be taken into consideration, with urgency to ensure our Fund continues to operate efficiently and transparently while protecting the interests of its members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee highlighted concerns relating to suspense accounts and the importance of accurate employer submissions. These issues directly affect workers because any delay or errors in contribution can impact retirement savings and benefits. I, therefore, support the recommendation for enhanced employer training and improved digital systems to ensure accurate and timely submissions. Accountability and transparency must remain at the center of FNPF operations.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue of offshore investment limitations raised by FNPF deserves consideration. The Fund indicated that while opportunities exist overseas, transfers remain subject to Reserve Bank of Fiji approvals. While safeguarding foreign reserves is important, there must be a balanced approach and dialogue between FNPF, and relevant authorities is imperative in this regard. This is to ensure members continue to receive strong and sustainable returns. The Committee's recommendation encouraging continued engagement with Reserve Bank of Fiji is therefore appropriate and necessary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another important issue raised during the consultation relates to seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand. The Committee acknowledged ongoing efforts to engage seasonal workers and facilitate direct contribution systems under overseas employment schemes. This is an important initiative because many Fijians working overseas wish to continue contributing towards their retirement security back home. I encourage FNPF to continue strengthening its partnership and awareness programmes so that overseas workers can fully benefit from membership opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to commend the efforts to expand voluntary membership among schoolchildren, farmers, informal workers and rural communities. Financial literacy, savings and investment culture must begin early. Encouraging young people and communities to participate in long-term saving schemes is a positive step towards reducing financial and economic vulnerabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to emphasise that strong governance, accountability, and fairness must remain central to the operation of FNPF. The retirement savings of workers are not merely financial figures. They represent dignity, security and the right of every hardworking Fijian.

Therefore, transparency in investment, proper due diligence, responsible governance, and timely reporting are essential in maintaining public confidence in the institution.

In conclusion, I commend the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its comprehensive review and recommendations. I also commend FNPF for its continued contribution towards the nation's development, economic growth and member welfare. The Fund has demonstrated resilience, strong financial management and strategic vision, however, there remains important work ahead in strengthening legislation, improving member services, increasing awareness and ensuring long-term sustainability.

I support the motion before Parliament, and I urge all stakeholders to continue working together to safeguard the future of Fijian workers and strengthen confidence in our economy and one of our nation's most important institution.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to speak on this motion and I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for this Report.

At the outset, let me state that we acknowledge FNPF's strong financial performance during the reporting period, which resulted from the reform undertaken in 2011. Revenue exceeding \$1.1 billion and 8.75 percent interest rate is the highest in more than 30 years and total assets of over \$10 billion, which was a significant achievement.

However, Mr. Speaker Sir, strong Fund performance is not the same as strong member outcomes, and that distinction is the heart of the concerns I wish to raise today. Is FNPF still fit for purpose as a national retirement institution for ordinary Fijians? On that question, there are serious issues that this House must honestly confront. Despite FNPF's strong financial position, 72 percent of members have less than \$20,000 in their accounts, while nearly 45 percent of members have balances below \$5,000. Even more alarming is that thousands of members over the age of 55 who should be preparing for retirement have less than \$5,000 in their FNPF account, with some even having zero or negative balances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, how does FNPF, generating over \$1 billion in income and managing \$10.6 billion in total assets, leave nearly half of its members financially unprepared for retirement with less than \$5,000 in savings? This tells us that strong investment performance alone does not guarantee retirement security. We believe this is a structural issue caused by years of premature withdrawals and inadequate long-term retirement planning. Unless we address these root causes, FNPF may remain financially strong while members themselves remain financially vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also a transparency issue that Parliament should not ignore - the pension take-up rate. One of the most important indicators of whether members are choosing retirement pensions or withdrawing lump sums, is not clearly reported. Parliament and members have a right to know whether some retirees are exhausting their savings early and increasing exposure to poverty in old age and becoming a burden to families and the State. Sir, FNPF must restore full reporting on pension take-up rates and clear public disclosure on retirement adequacy trends in all future Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another serious issue is the employer non-compliance, and we have heard from other Members. The Report shows that unpaid employer contribution increased from \$12.5 million to \$14.6 million in just more than one year, despite a second amnesty recently announced by FNPF. So, we must ask, did the first amnesty improve compliance, or did it simply encourage employers to delay payments in the hope that another amnesty would come? Why are repeat offenders continually being given leniency, while compliant employers receive no reward?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, workers' FNPF contributions are deferred wages belonging to workers. When employers fail to remit them on time, are they not effectively using workers' retirement savings as free business capital? If unpaid contributions continue to rise even after repeated amnesty, does this not show that the current enforcement framework lacks real deterrence? The review of the FNPF Act must ask some tough questions. Should directors be personally liable for repeated breaches? Should chronic defaulters be publicly named? Should future amnesty be strictly limited to protecting the integrity of workers' savings?

The Committee's Report noted with appropriate concern that FNPF's offshore portfolio grew by \$1.1 billion, a 31.8 percent increase yet the Reserve Bank of Fiji approved only \$100 million in additional offshore transfers during the year. This is a structural constraint that Parliament must take seriously. We are concerned about the concentration of FNPF investment within Fiji's domestic economy, particularly in tourism-related assets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNPF members should not have their retirement future overly dependent on one sector after what we experienced during COVID-19 and even during several severe cyclones that came our way. We ask the honourable Minister to engage with the Reserve Bank in a structured policy dialogue, not to circumvent monetary sovereignty, but to develop a transparent rule-based framework for FNPF offshore investment that balances macro-economic stability and member protection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one finding in the annual report that the Committee did not sufficiently interrogate concerns the commercial lending portfolio. This portfolio grew 13.1 percent to \$1.4 billion in the financial year 2025, yet income from lending rose only marginally from \$65.3 million to \$67.3 million. This is a significant margin compression signal. A 13 percent growth in a lending portfolio, producing only 3 percent income increases, suggest that the Fund is deploying more capital for diminishing marginal returns. We seek clarity from the Board on the risk-adjusted return profile of this portfolio and whether its current strategic weight is appropriate, given the competitive dynamics the FNPF itself acknowledges.

Another worrying issue raised in the Report is the increasing number of migration withdrawals, which exceeded \$82 million in financial year 2025. Every migration withdrawal means not only a loss of savings from the Fund, but also the loss of future contributors to the retirement system. Sir, FNPF must remain first and foremost, a social protection institution designed to ensure dignity and security of workers in retirement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to make FNPF truly fit for purpose, we believe several reforms are necessary – an independent actuarial assessment of what constitutes adequate retirement savings in Fiji's current cost-of-living environment, stronger employer compliance enforcement, greater offshore diversification to reduce domestic risk, full transparency on pension trends and member retirement outcomes. The true measure of FNPF's success is not only how much income it earns, but whether ordinary workers can retire with dignity after decades of contribution.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee for their Report. I do not want to repeat all the statistics that have been provided by honourable Members who have spoken before me, unlike honourable Bala, who says things sometimes without understanding the real consequences of how and what the FNPF offshore investment would mean.

I think honourable Kumar highlighted a number of real issues and they make a lot of sense, whether you talk about retirement institution, whether you talk about pension take-up, and whether you talk about what the members are getting at the end of the day. However, let me just remind her - I think she started by saying that the FNPF's strong performance today is a result of the reform that

was undertaken unilaterally in 2011. In fact, that reform and those unilateral decisions, and she mentioned why we need another actuarial study which would have pointed out risks and what might have happened in the future, but the way in which that was done sent a very, very bad signal to the members themselves. Whether you talk about those who wanted to withdraw when they were leaving the country or whether you want to talk about those who chose to withdraw lump sums as opposed to going on a pension, that rests on what happened in 2011 because there was a sudden change from 15 percent to a reduced rate.

The previous government had already decided, in fact, the FNPF management had decided to reduce the pension rate further. It was, we, when we came into government, we said, “no”, and Government actually gave a commitment that government borrowing will keep the interest rate at that level so that FNPF could continue to keep that higher pension rate. By then, Mr. Speaker, the rate of pension for members was not lucrative at all. Many of them felt that they would need to withdraw a lump sum and, obviously, many of them were looking for alternative investments.

We heard that FNPF has had strong financial performance and, obviously, the members received the highest interest payment of 8.75 percent for the first time in 30 years. I think that came on the backdrop of a strong financial performance and the ability of FNPF to pay that high interest rate. Member contributions, Mr. Speaker, continue to increase significantly and that reflected stronger employment conditions and higher contribution activity. That is partly the result of good growth in the economy in the last three years and more particularly in 2024 and 2025.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, FNPF needs to continue to look at how it can improve member services and member benefits, so one of the things that we have been asking FNPF to do is to look at whether we could have a national health insurance scheme. Sir, FNPF was landed with Aspen Ba and Lautoka Hospital, they have a management portfolio there. There is an investment that FNPF did and we supported FNPF to relook at how they could refine some of the agreements that they had and whether that could be used as a future healthcare provision based on some kind of insurance as well.

Mr. Speaker, the point that honourable Bala was raising, I think he does not understand the inherent risk of offshore investment and there are issues with respect to that. I think the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) has taken a very prudent approach in terms of restricting or taking a much more cautious look at offshore investment because the market offshore is not as lucrative because there are a lot of competitive investors not only from Fiji, but all around the world in offshore investments. So, it is very important that RBF, which has a supervisory role for FNPF, takes the prudent approach because the last thing you want to do is some overzealous management or board looking at an easier option of offshore investment and hoping that there will be a lot of returns from that.

In the last three years, the FNPF has also introduced some very good reforms, reduced membership entry age to birth. A lot of families are using that as an opportunity to improve savings from a very early age. Improved housing withdrawal policies have been introduced. They have rolled out customer relationship systems, expanded retirement literacy, and overseas member engagement, and we have also allowed members to join twice. If they had withdrawn fully, they could rejoin. The age has been extended to 59, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Finally, just to let honourable Bala know — he was talking about some board appointments, but he knows very well the kind of people who are appointed to the Board. There was one Board member who was a campaign Manager and Finance Director of the FijiFirst Party. We have appointed some of the best-qualified Board members to FNPF.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is another issue.

The Westin was bought by FNPF in 2017 under the FijiFirst Government. There are various issues, and I think it will come out very soon as to what happened then and the impact of what you are seeing now. You do not know the full story.

(Hon. P.D. Kumar interjected)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not come here and exaggerate and pontificate about what was done right.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FNPF is in a very strong position, and I agree with honourable Premila Kumar that there are areas where they need to look at, how to make it a much more friendly retirement institution as well for our members, and additional member services like health insurance, health facilities, and other support that could be provided for ordinary members whose balances are very low.

I want to commend the Board and the Management of FNPF for producing such a healthy and very satisfying financial situation for the FNPF.

MR. SPEAKER.- As soon as honourable Bala enters the room, the energy rises.

(Laughter)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, Point of Order.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- My Point of Order is under Standing Order 29A(2) - A Member must not make any social media posting or media releases in relation to any parliamentary business during the sitting of Parliament or any Parliamentary Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been brought to our attention that honourable Premila Kumar has posted about the Education Bill 2025 on her *Facebook* page while we are still seated in session. That is disallowed under Standing Order 29A(2).

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Kumar, do you plead guilty?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Absolutely, Sir. I did not know about that. I seriously did not know.

MR. SPEAKER.- Then you are not familiar with the provision.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I might argue against that because this is the very same Standing Order that, in the previous session when I was in Opposition and honourable Premila Kumar was in Chambers, when the former Attorney-General -Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, made a Point of Order in the exact section about not allowing posts during sessions while we are seated on Parliamentary business. They are very familiar because they brought this Standing Order, they brought this amendment and brought it into the Standing Orders during their time. It was an amendment in the last session of Parliament.

The post by honourable Premila Kumar states, “Education Bill passed in Parliament. Schools can now introduce school levies.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what has been posted and should be pulled under Standing Order 74 for disorderly conduct.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, I can only apologise. I have pleaded guilty and I do apologise.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that it is important that we set this precedent and for you to take some time to make your ruling because it is important. It has now gone viral and has 80 shares already. The way that it is being posted - schools can now introduce school levies.

Just picking on that from that particular whole Act that was brought before Parliament, clearly this is, for lack of a better word, campaigning. Yes, it started today but this is what is stated here and being shared with comments attacking Government once again on digging into the pockets of taxpayers taken out of context and misleading. This needs to be looked at and the purpose of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but, again, during the sitting.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will take that into account. I will give my ruling later after I have taken all those evidence which you are trying to present before me. We leave it as it is. We have heard from honourable Kumar on the issue. Let me do my own thing tomorrow.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was just starting to smile, with honourable Bala and honourable Professor Prasad's exchange. I want to, first of all, thank the Committee for its Report. They have actually pointed out some very pertinent things with respect to the Fiji National Provident Fund Annual 2025 Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think Committee Reports are actually very important and as you can see from the discussions that we have had, quite a number of issues have actually come up. With regards to FNPF, I think successive Governments that have come in and left have gone through different measures in terms of their policies.

I do not think we should stand here and pontificate about someone being at fault or not, because right now, as we stand, that very same FNPF is worth billions of dollars. They might have had their ups and downs, but I do not think we should go into finger-pointing exercise. Rather than that, perhaps we ought to say ‘thank you’ to the father of FNPF, the late A.D. Patel, who was a founder member of the National Federation Party. Without his idea, FNPF would not be around and for all those people who made FNPF grow until today.

Successive Governments have made it successful, our working population has made it successful, 99.9 percent of the investments that it has made have proved correct. It is a massive property owner, it is the biggest property owner in terms of tourism in Denarau and if you just look at what the Committee pointed out in terms of the milestone achievement, its revenue collection of \$1.1 billion at 30th June, 2025, compared to \$900 million in 2024, is actually a phenomenal achievement - not just an achievement for now, it is an achievement from many, many moons ago in how it started.

As I have said, the investments in Bank of the South Pacific (BSP) that was pointed out, Amalgamated Telecom Holdings Limited (ATH), Home Finance Company Limited (HFC), hotels, even offshore investments, and I agree somewhat with honourable Professor Prasad with respect to offshore investments being very risky and I think we also need to be respectful to the Reserve Bank of Fiji who might sometimes put a stunt on what someone might consider a little bit of growth, but at the same time, we also need to make sure that we get the best returns for those that

are part of FNPF - the actual nurse, the farmer or whoever it is, that actually contributes to it. Whilst doing all of these, I think FNPF maintains its operational expenditure at a pretty reasonable level and considering there is an increased service demand and inflationary pressures, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, one of the glaring issues that we all need to face up to and this is not poppycock though, but at the end of the day, if you are an investment company and you have a \$200-plus million blowout with respect to an investment that you have made, this is cause for some serious concern.

Mr. Speaker, on a previous occasion in Parliament, I recall I had asked the honourable Minister for Finance regarding this issue with respect to The Westin. The Westin is an iconic property that was bought some time ago. I think honourable Professor Prasad said it was bought in 2017, but the problem here, and this problem was raised by me then, is that FNPF bought it. The FNPF then engaged Fletcher Construction to do the construction and FNPF itself owned 25 percent of the construction company. Just that conflict rises ought to have reddened people's ears, ought to have, at least, started an inquiry or so, especially in light of the fact that there is such a huge conflict - ethical conflict that exists.

I do not need to explain it to you, Mr. Speaker, you would know this better than most people about the ethical conduct that needs to come out of people who are in charge of investment funds. Are you actually going to sue your own company? I hear also, subject to correction by someone in this House, that now that very same construction company is 100 percent owned by two Fijian institutions - one happens to be the FNPF, the other happens to be Fijian Holdings. Now, you have an entirely local company which is now 50 percent owned by FNPF, yet the project is still not complete.

You have a \$200-plus million contractual blowout. Now, you tell me, Sir, if you took it away from FNPF and you put that in a private investment company and you had a blowout of that magnitude, what would you be doing? Would you not be in court? Would you not be suing? Would you not be firing? Would you not have a massive inquiry as to why we are in that particular position? This is one of the largest investment bodies in Fiji. This is not your money nor my money, this is our money; all of those people who have invested in it. It is not just \$2, and we cannot be flippant with the answers when those questions are actually raised in this august Parliament.

I remember the question that I asked, that the conflict rose and there is a potential that you are going to end up suing your own company. The Minister responsible then said, “Oh no, that is a new question” and described the dispute as a family matter that was going to be resolved within the family. Sir, you cannot be flippant with \$200 -plus odd million. Who is going to compensate the actual owners of FNPF – the nurses, carpenters and poor workers who are all owners of the FNPF? Who is going to compensate for the delays? Every single delay on a construction site has a penalty on it. Does that mean that FNPF is going to pay itself now? What is going to happen? These are the conflicts that arise.

Now, my point here, Mr. Speaker, is that this is the kind of things that means that we need to ask the questions. We need to, in a bipartisan fashion, just like we did with the Housing Authority inquiry. When there was an issue, there is a committee conducting that inquiry. Why is it that we cannot do that now? This is a \$200-plus million blowout - this is not some small funds.

There is a gap of about \$140 million, if a \$90 million project cost, and then it more than almost doubles and goes to \$180 million, but \$200-plus million means it is over-doubled. Who did this? Who sanctioned it? Who signed off on it? Who actually allowed FNPF's own company to start the construction on its own project? How did that happen? There is a legal question that arises here,

Mr. Speaker. This is a question that we will all get asked when we go outside this House. Did you ask the right questions or were we being flippant in our answers to it and just fobbing it aside?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the scenarios that have been created, they are actually quite absurd and the legal eagles that exist in FNPF and within this august House need to sit up and take notice because this is not something small. This will mean that there is some kind of abuse that has gone on, something has gone on, and something is not actually correct.

We are talking about 400,000-odd Fijians' pension funds; their retirement and their security, so this is something that needs to be asked, and I thank the Committee for raising this particular issue. I urge this House or I urge the Committee to instigate an inquiry into this matter to find out exactly what happened. It is important that we do because we are the representatives of the people, because we are the ones that are answerable, because we will be answerable when the election comes up, because they will ask you - what happened to that \$200 million extra blowout out of FNPF on one particular project?

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, this is the largest property owner on Denarau, but something is not right - something is amiss. The question that we must all ask is, who approved it? How was that extra \$140 million approved? Now, all of these questions still remain unanswered to-date. Will the conflicts actually manage by the Fund, why is the Fund so silent? There is a deathly silence from the Board with respect to all of this.

I urge everyone to ponder this. This is a responsibility that belongs to us. This is a responsibility that we must undertake, as Parliamentarians, to conduct a proper inquiry into this matter and to find out what went wrong.

Lastly, Sir, I know there is a review going on with respect to the FNPF laws. I urge the honourable Ministers that are involved in the review to do that in a swift manner, to try and ensure that this never, ever happens again because I fear the deathly silence from FNPF and the deathly silence of this particular matter means that there is something that has brewed in there and it is basically got a cap on it and no one wants to touch it.

With those few words, I thank the Committee for its Report, and I thank the Committee for coming up with those particular recommendations and being forthright about where we are with the FNPF.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee to speak in reply.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted all the positive contributions made by the honourable Members during the debate on this Review Report of the Fiji National Provident Fund 2025 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank the Board members, Chief Executive Officer and the staff of FNPF for their commitment, dedication and unwavering support towards the Member Fund and its administration.

On that note, Sir, I fully support the motion before the House and I thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting today. I thank you all for your presence and your contribution. It has been a very long day. Some of us, including the Chair, have stumbled and fumbled our way through the later part of today, so we all deserve a good rest. Rest well with what is left of the night and see you all tomorrow.

Parliament stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.55 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 75/2026 tabled by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation (Ref. Page 740)


**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR TOURISM & CIVIL AVIATION
(Hon. V.R. Gavoka)**

Reply to Question No. 75/2026 is as follows:

Background

A key driver of economic growth is Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Given their dominance in the tourism private sector, support for their long-term recovery and expansion is critical to creating high-quality visitor experiences and facilitating community benefits from tourism.

Some data suggests up to 80 percent of the sector comprises SMEs – highlighting the prevalence of SMEs in the sector and the growing need for a structured support system that can optimise productivity and impact.

The Pilot Micro and Small Enterprise (MSE) Fund aims to support and empower tourism micro and small enterprises by providing financial assistance in the form of grants. It will focus on creating diversified tourism products and experiences.

In the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 financial years, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation was allocated \$400,000 respectively in budget support to Pilot the programme. Implementing the programme as a Pilot was to ensure the Ministry is able to roll it out in a manner which builds on longer-term sustainability and impact of access to finance programmes of Government.

Businesses that fall under the ‘micro’ category were eligible to apply for grants of up to \$15,000. ‘Small’ businesses were eligible to apply for grants up to \$25,000.

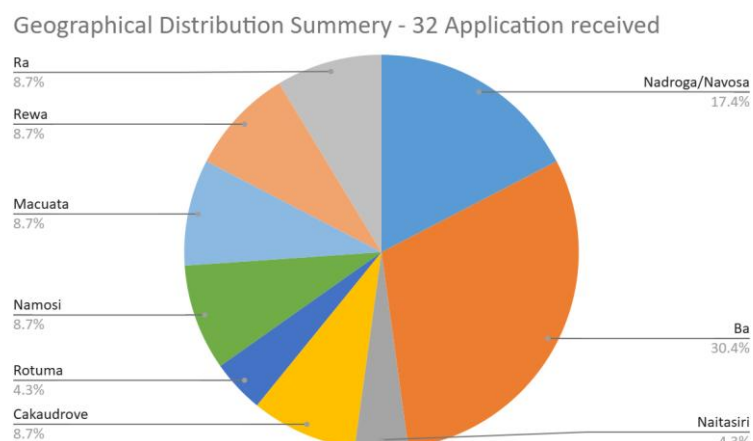
Key Application Highlights for Financial Year 2025-2026

The second Expression of Interest (EOI) for the Pilot MSE Fund was launched on 3rd August, 2025 and closed on 30th September, 2025. A total of 32 applications were received.

While this reflects a decrease in volume compared to the previous financial year, there has been a notable improvement in the overall quality of submissions. The screening rates indicate a balanced assessment process, while the high conversion rate from shortlisted to approved applications suggests strong alignment between applicant quality and the Fund’s criteria.

The geographical distribution of applicants indicates continued concentration in the Western Division. The Ba Province recorded the highest number of submissions, reflecting its role as a major tourism hub. This was followed by Nadroga/Navosa and Ra, showing increased participation from these provinces compared to previous rounds.

Increased submissions from Cakaudrove and Macuata also reflect growing interest from the Northern Division, which aligns with recent development initiatives and engagement under projects such as Na Vualiku.

Chart 1: Geographical Distribution Summary

Applications reflected a diverse range of tourism sub-sectors, with the highest operation in:

- (a) tour operations;
- (b) marine and adventure tourism;
- (c) homestay accommodation; and
- (d) cultural experiences.

Notably, growing applications related to diving operations, reflecting the growing interest in marine and adventure tourism in Fiji. Many of the funded projects also focused on capacity enhancement through the purchase of tourism-related equipment such as boat motors, dive equipment, and e-bikes, alongside risk mitigation upgrades and improved safety measures.

Projects also demonstrated a strong emphasis on sustainability initiatives, particularly solar installations, as well as investments in visitor experience development through cultural performance spaces and guided tours.

In terms of business size, 58 percent of applicants were classified as small enterprises, reflecting an increase compared to the previous financial year, while 27 percent were micro businesses, indicating a decline from last year's round. Medium-sized and start-up enterprises remain ineligible under the Pilot.

Compared to the previous funding round, there was a higher proportion of established and formally operating businesses applying. However, limited financial literacy continues to be a challenge among micro enterprises.

In terms of gender, 18 percent of applications were submitted by women entrepreneurs.

The first Selection Panel meeting was held on 24 November 2025, where 19 shortlisted applications were assessed. Of these, 12 projects were approved for funding. In addition, 11 committed business applications were carried forward from the previous financial year. Notably, two additional applications from the previous financial year were approved by the Selection Panel.

In total, 25 applications were approved and committed for funding, amounting to \$399,648, of which 91 percent of the grant funds (\$365,910.55) have been disbursed to date.

Several promising proposals were deferred and prioritised for the next financial year due to funding commitments, exceeding the allocated \$400,000 ceiling.

Conclusion

The utilisation of funds this year is expected to exceed the allocated budget, the programme has demonstrated strong effectiveness. Across both financial years, recipients have included a diverse range of enterprises such as village tours, homestays, marine adventure tourism ventures and strong emphasis in ecotourism.

The Fund directly supports the Government's objective of growing Fiji's tourism sector by expanding participation, improving product quality, strengthening supply chains, and enhancing resilience across the visitor economy. It acts as a targeted catalyst to unlock the potential of micro and small operators, who form the backbone of Fiji's tourism offering, especially in rural and maritime areas.

Through this grant and the Ministry's joint efforts to support MSE businesses, more than 50 percent of applicants and recipients have participated in Business Continuity training, business literacy training, tour guide training and digital skills training. These opportunities have enabled businesses to improve their operational skills, strengthen sustainability, enhance risk awareness, and build networks with other MSEs.

The Ministry published awareness videos for applicants, which also provided marketing exposure for the featured businesses.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning are in process to more effectively assess the impact of the programme.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 76/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Enterprises, Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts (Ref. Page 741)



**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC ENTERPRISES, MULTI-ETHNIC AFFAIRS,
CULTURE, HERITAGE AND ARTS
(Hon. C.J. Singh)**

Reply to Question No. 76/2026 is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I provide below the following information:

- (a) The total number of unplanned electricity outages recorded by Energy Fiji Limited during the financial year 2024-2025?
In 2024, the number of unplanned electricity outages totalled 1,656, while in 2025, the total was 1,829.
- (b) The average duration of those outages?
The average duration of unplanned electricity outages stated in (a) is as follows:
- 2024 - 317.74 minutes; and
 - 2025 - 306.71 minutes.
- (c) The capital programme for grid reliability over the financial year 2025-2026?
Energy Fiji Limited is committed to improving its infrastructure and services. Therefore, the company has developed a \$522.66 million capital expenditure plan for its network (\$44.66 million); generation (\$35.72 million); system planning and control (\$57.45 million); special projects (\$363.57 million); customer services (\$4.4 million); human resources (\$0.1 million); finance (\$2.25 million); information technology (\$1.59 million); and properties (\$12.93 million). A breakdown of the plan, along with expenditure till 30th April, 2026, is tabulated below:

Table 1: Approved Capex Plan for 2026 - Expenditure YTD April 2026

Business Objective - Project	Approved Capex FY26	YTD Actuals April 2026(\$000)	Variance (\$000)
NETWORK			
Compliance/Regulatory			
Tools & Equipment -Transmission & Distribution	600	366	234
Improve Reliability			
Upgrade of 6.6kV Distribution to 11kV	2,300	245	2,055
Hibiscus Park to Wailekutu 33kV Second Circuit	1,300	39	1,261
Development of 33/11kV substation at Nawai and 33kV TL extension - C56132105A	3,500		3,500
Replace Cunningham - Kinoya 33kV Cables and Old Kinoya 33kV Bus Extension -	3,000	698	2,302
Replace 11kV/33kV, 10/12.5MVA T1 at Vuda (1975)	1,500		1,500
Replace 11kV/33kV, 10/12.5MVA T2 at Vuda (1975)	1,500		1,500

Business Objective - Project	Approved Capex FY26	YTD Actuals April 2026(\$000)	Variance (\$000)
JNET0185-Supply & Install 33kV Switchgear @ Rarawai Subs	1,000	8	992
Relocation to new pad and commission 25MVA Transformer at New Kinoya Sub	80	0	80
Upgrade Maro Zone Substation to Standard	3,000	413	2,587
Monasavu Hydro Electric Scheme Half Life Refurbishment (Wailoa Mimic Panel) - JNET0177	300	166	134
Rust Refurbishment - Transmission Towers	10,250	306	9,944
Civil work at Cunningham Substation / Retention for Vuda	175	144	31
Replace 33kV/11KV T1 at Tavua Substation	1,250	325	925
Replace 33kV/11KV T1 at Waqadra Substation (1988)	1,700	1,128	572
Replace 33kV/11KV T2 at Waqadra Substation (1988)	1,700	1,128	572
Replace 33kV/11KV T1 at Pineapple Corner Substation (1990)	2,000		2,000
Replace 33kV/11KV T2 at Pineapple Corner Substation (1990)	2,000		2,000
Replace 11kV Switchgear at Pineapple Corner Substation	1,500		1,500
Upgrade 11kV Switchgear at Lautoka Switching Station	500		500
Upgrade 11kV Switchgear at Waqadra Substation	500		500
Upgrade of 33kV High bus to low bus with associated Disconnectors and fitting - Rarawai SS, Pineapple Corner SS, Waqadra SS, Vuda RCC	1,000		1,000
Aged Asset Replacement - Substation	1,000	246	754
Replacement of Triangular mast towers with 24m Free standing triangular towers [x 4]	350		350
Upgrade 132kV Switchgear for T5 (5H40) at Wailoa Substation	150		150
Scada Upgrade Project - Digicel / RTU & Digital Radio Network Upgrade	200	24	176
Upgrade of 2x15/18MVA & 33KV/11KV 15/18 MVA Power Transformer @ Voivoi Zone Sub	200	7	193
Replacement of 33kV Bus to at Hibiscus Park Substation	2,100	452	1,648
Total Proposed Capex	44,655	5,696	38,959
GENERATION			
Improve Reliability			
Wailoa Half Life Refurbishment / Gate & Rake House Upgrade of facilities	7,000	2,947	4,053
Major Upgrade of Wailoa Power Station Building & Office	750		750
Wailoa Staff Quarters Concrete Driveway	20		20
Upgrade of Kinoya G8 and G9 Turbocharger	1,950	660	1,290
Upgrade Fire Water Tank	1,850		1,850
Wartsila PLC Control system upgrade	600	207	393
Crane upgrade	500		500
1 x Remote Radiator for QSK60 (G6)	475		475
Refurbishment of the Station 415V Main Board	675	43	632
Installation of large capacity Interceptor	375		375

Business Objective - Project	Approved Capex FY26	YTD Actuals April 2026(\$000)	Variance (\$000)
Replace T1, T2, T3, T4 Generator Transformers	1,000		1,000
Refurbishment of Turbine generator, Controls and HV Switchgear -Wainiqueu	1,000		1,000
Upgrade 415V Board & Control Desk -Wainiqueu	500		500
Fire tank, hydrant, sprinklers, lines Upgrade - Wainiqueu	500		500
Control System (PLC) Upgrade - hardware & software - Nagado	800		800
Control System (PLC) Upgrade - hardware & software -Wainikasou	1,500		1,500
Replacement of the Earthing Transformers - Korovou P/S	600		600
Office furniture & equipment replacement	50		50
Tools & Equipment - Generation	30	25	5
Condition Monitoring System, Equipment & Training	40		40
New 2 x 5MW Diesel Generators Labasa	10,000	1,546	8,454
Deuba Power Station Major Upgrade Works	500		500
Retention & Milestone balance for 50 x 1MW	5,000		5,000
Total Proposed Capex	35,715	5,429	30,286
SYSTEM PLANNING AND CONTROL			
Compliance/Regulatory			
Distribution System Reinforcement	2,000	1,341	659
EFL Capital Contribution for Subdivision Projects (25% FCCC Determination)	1,500	692	808
Improve Reliability			
Power System Protection Equipment Upgrade	200		200
Fault Level Management (NER) and Reactive Power Compensation (Capacitor Banks/ Voltage Reg	1,170		1,170
USP 33kV/11KV Substation. Vatuwaqa to USP 33kV Cable	6,420		6,420
New 33kV Cunningham - Sawani Circuit	2,000		2,000
Re-Route 11kV Hibiscus Park & Vatuwaqa Fdrs from Kinoya P/S to Kaua Rd at LBE.	580		580
Yalalevu 33kV/11kV S/S + TL from Naikabula to Yalalevu	1,000		1,000
Replace old 33kV Vatuwaqa - Suva cable - Hibiscus Park	3,000		3,000
Naboro 33kV/11KV Substation	2,500		2,500
Kalabu TFZ Substation & Linking to Existing 33kV 4,000 Network	4,000		4,000
National Control Centre - Fully fledged	7,500		7,500
Gentrack Velocity Billing System Upgrade	80		80
Wailoaloa Substation & Linking to Existing 33kV Network-JNET0193	5,000		5,000
Replace 2 x 11kV underground Interconnector from 1,500 Pineapple Corner - Lautoka SS	1,500		1,500
New 33kV Transmission line from Koronubu SS to Tavua SS including bay extensions at Tavua SS and Koronubu SS	9,000		9,000
Establishment of new 33/11KV Substation at Fiji Water in Yaqara and extension of new 33kV Transmission line from Tavua SS to proposed	10,000		10,000

Business Objective - Project	Approved Capex FY26	YTD Actuals April 2026(\$000)	Variance (\$000)
substation at Fiji Water in Yaqara			
Total Proposed Capex	57,450	2,033	55,417
SPECIAL PROJECTS			
Improve Reliability			
Virara Switching Station, Virara to Koronubu 132kV TL, Koronubu 132/33kV Substation and 33kV Network Integration	22,000	2,178	19,822
Ba Solar Site Land Acquisition Cost			
Nakobalevu Access Rd from Savusa- EFL Repeater 22 Site	270	9	261
Land Lease for Taveuni 1MW Solar Site	22		22
Solar Power Plant in Vanua Levu - Seaqaqa/ EIA Study for Proposed Ground mounted Solar PV Farm with BESS @ Seaqaqa	50		50
Pre-Feasibility Study for ground mounted Solar farm with battery energy storage system- PROJ0196	150	21	129
Tools & Equipment for Civil Engineering Team and Lands Team	500	138	362
Additional Land at Koronubu (next to Substation)	20		20
Additional land at Tavua Solar Site	5		5
Network Augmentation & EFL Costs to integrate IPP Solar at Ovalau	64	12	52
Lease for 132kV TL access roads (19 +13 leases to acquire)	150		150
132kV Transmission Network Augmentation	200		200
Grid Extensions for IFC Solar Interconnectivity (New Addition)	15,000		15,000
Upgrading works on Butoni Wind Farm Access Road	5,250		5,250
Solar Dedicated Generation Evacuation Lines (GEL)	1,000	159	841
Head Office Extension (Design Consultancy & Construction Supervision)	10,940		10,940
Grid Integration of Dratabu 5MW Solar (Sunergise)	3,320	199	3,121
Profit Maximizing			
New Generation Addition at Kinoya 20MW HFO	34,300	1,576	32,724
New Generation Additional 30MW HFO Vuda	45,000	5,573	39,427
Lower Ba hydro-electric scheme (VATUTOKOTOKO)	80,000		80,000
Substation+Lines+Capacitator+Transformer+Non Solar GEL	92,250		92,250
165.78 MW Solar + BESS - 10MW (4 hours)	50,000		50,000
Total Proposed Capex	363,566	9,864	353,702
CUSTOMER SERVICES			
Compliance/Regulatory			
New Meter Connections (All meter types)/Test Bench & Equipment	2,500	859	1,641
Improve Reliability			
Replacement of Existing Meter & Metering Accessories	1,638	130	1,508
Syntell Upgrade TID Rollover	250		250
Contact Center Phones & Accessories	7	2	5
RT for Vehicles	7		7

Business Objective - Project	Approved Capex FY26	YTD Actuals April 2026(\$000)	Variance (\$000)
Total Proposed Capex	4,402	991	3,411
HUMAN RESOURCES			
Compliance/Regulatory			
Recruitment Software/Payroll	50		50
Tools/Equipment	50		50
	100		100
FINANCE			
Improve Reliability			
Motor Vehicle Purchase	1,500	155	1,345
New Fleet Workshop in Kinoya and Navutu	750		750
Total Proposed Capex	2,250	155	2,095
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY			
Compliance/Regulatory			
Server Room Security/Compliance upgrades	100		100
CCTV Security Surveillance Refresh	50		50
Improve Reliability			
Firewall Refresh/Upgrade	150		150
Laptops, PCs, Printers	250		250
Server/Network & Platform Services Refresh	350	34	316
Cardax Access Control Solution	20	18	2
DRC Resilience Upgrade	50		50
UPS Refresh	50		50
FMIS Upgrade	20	7	13
GIS/CMMS	500	2	498
Generation Planning Tool - Software	50		50
Total Proposed Capex	1,590	62	1,528
CEO-Properties			
Compliance/Regulatory			
Replacement of Furniture H/O EFL	80		80
Improve Reliability			
Air Conditioning New/Replacement Fijiwide	170		170
Transmission Workshop-Kinoya	2,300		2,300
New Liveline Workshop - Navutu	700		700
Establish Depots for Network Team in Rakiraki and Korovou	850		850
Substations Spares Stores/Warehouse - Navutu	30		30
Extension of Training Centre Navutu	7,700	1,401	6,299
New Inspection Workshop	50		50
Kinoya Depot Fence Upgrade	300		300
Navutu Depot Fence Upgrade	300		300
Fire Protection System Upgrade (Head Office, Kinoya, Navutu, NCC, Taveuni and Labasa)	250		250
Construction of Security Booth (Vatuwaqa, Cunningham, NCC Staff Compound, Nadarivatu)	200		200
	12,930	1,401	11,529
Total Capital Expenditure as at 30th April 2026	522,658	25,632	497,026

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 77/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government (Ref. Page 741)



**MINISTER FOR HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
(Hon. M.K. Nalumisa)**

Reply to Question No. 77/2026 is as follows:

(a) Key Achievements

(i) Housing Authority Interest Rate Initiative (June 2025) - Launched the lowest-ever interest rate structure to enhance affordability:

Over the last two years, Housing Authority has undergone a significant transformation in its operational performance and service delivery, marked by groundbreaking financial initiatives and a renewed focus on housing supply. A cornerstone of this progress is the June 2025 launch of the Authority's lowest-ever interest rate structure, designed specifically to bring homeownership within reach for low-and middle-income earners.

Under this scheme, households earning below \$30,000 per annum benefit from a 2 percent fixed rate for the first five years, while those earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000 are offered a 3.5 percent fixed rate. These rates transition to manageable variable rates of 4 percent and 6 percent respectively from the sixth year, providing a stable and affordable pathway for families to secure their financial future.

- Incomes below \$30,000 per annum
Fixed at 2 percent for the first five years, with a variable rate of 4 percent from year six onwards.
- Incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000
Fixed at 3.5 percent for the first five years, with a variable rate of 6 percent from year six onwards.

(ii) Construction of Model Homes:

In addition to financial reforms, the Authority has addressed the supply-side crisis by reintroducing the construction of model homes, a strategic move that has not been seen in three decades. This initiative is designed to assist families who face significant hurdles in navigating the complexities of land purchase and self-construction by providing ready-built, accessible housing options.

(iii) Village Scheme Relaunch:

Complementing this is the successful relaunch of the Village Scheme, which extends the Authority's reach into rural areas. This programme not only expands the housing footprint but also provides a vital economic boost to *Mataqali* landowning units by facilitating secured lease income.

(iv) Completed Land Development Projects

The Authority's commitment to land development is evidence by the successful completion of a few key projects that cater to diverse social needs:

- Covata
99 residential lots were delivered in 2024. Of these, 58 lots are priced between \$44,000 and \$80,000, and sales for the remaining 41 lots are in progress.
- Deuba
29 lots have been developed, catering to 1 Public Rental Board (PRB) tenant, 22 families earning below \$50,000, and 6 families from informal settlements.
- Tavakubu Phase 2
57 lots have been allocated to sitting tenants, with funding secured through a \$2.7 million Government Grant.

(v) Model Home Construction Projects (Launched in June 2025)

The Housing Authority has launched an ambitious suite of model home construction projects as of June 2026 to further saturate the market with affordable options. Major developments are currently underway in:

- Nepani Phase 1
Out of 174 lots, 101 units have been awarded in October 2025, with delivery of 31 units scheduled for June 2026, and 70 lots to be awarded by July 2026. In addition, 30 vacant lots advertised for EOI in April/May to be also awarded by July 2026, and 43 lots to commence construction from September 2026.
- Nepani Phase 2
Comprises 141 lots, with 112 designated for model homes and 9 vacant lots.
- Davuilevu Phase 1
92 lots are available, with 50 model homes to be completed by July 2026.
- Davuilevu Phase 2
Includes 465 lots, with 300 earmarked for model homes and 165 vacant lots.
- Tavakubu Phase 1
166 lots are designated, with 24 model homes to be constructed.
- Tavakubu Phase 3:
150 lots are allocated for model homes.
- Wainibuku
19 lots are available, with 7 allocated through Expression of Interest (EOI) and 8 to the Ministry of Housing for evicted informal settlement households.

(b) Upcoming Initiatives

To address the escalating demand for affordable and safe housing, the Housing Authority has established a robust and long-term pipeline of strategic developments designed to provide a steady supply of residential lots and turn-key homes well into the next decade, as follows:

- Tacirua Phase 2
This development will deliver 298 lots; civil works for this development are scheduled to commence in August 2025 and are expected to reach completion by December 2026.
- Veikoba
This development is planned for a significant undertaking yielding 537 lots, with civil works projected to run from October 2025 through 2028.
- Wairabetia
Housing Authority is progressing towards the Wairabetia project, which is set to feature 611 lots. A standout component of this development is the planned construction of 299 model homes, with onsite work scheduled to begin in late 2027. By integrating ready-built homes into the development plan, the Authority aims to streamline the transition into homeownership for

families who may not have the resources to manage the construction process independently. This initiative underscores the shift toward providing comprehensive housing solutions rather than just vacant land

- Waila

The Authority's long-term vision is the massive Waila project, an expansive 800-acre development that will fundamentally transform the housing landscape. Planned for execution in four distinct phases between 2027 and 2032, this project is expected to yield a total of approximately 4,800 lots. Phase 1 is expected to begin in 2027, with subsequent phases launching annually through 2032 to ensure consistent delivery of housing stock.

(c) Performance and Service Delivery Improvements

To modernize its operations and restore public confidence, the Housing Authority has undergone a comprehensive digital transformation, and a comprehensive restructure of its service delivery processes, as follows:

(i) Transparent Allocation Process

By adopting a public "barrel draw" system for the distribution of lots, the Authority has eliminated ambiguity and ensured that every eligible applicant has an equal and fair opportunity to secure property.

(ii) Public Objection Process

This transparency is further reinforced by a newly established formal public objection process, which invites community scrutiny and ensures that land development and allocations are conducted with the highest levels of integrity and accountability.

(iii) Enhanced Lending System

Upgrades have also been integrated into the Housing Authority's core business functions to significantly improve efficiency and customer experience. The lending system has undergone major upgrades to accelerate application processing and enhance accessibility for borrowers.

(iv) Electronic Document Management System (EDMS)

The introduction of an Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) has transformed internal workflows. This system allows for seamless handling and rapid retrieval of critical documents, reducing the administrative delays that previously hindered service delivery.

(v) System Upgrade

The Housing Authority Navision system has been successfully upgraded to a Business Central platform, that provides a more integrated approach in managing the Authority's finances and core business operations.

The Housing Authority remains committed to its mandate of providing affordable and quality housing solutions for all Fijians.

ANNEXURE IV

Reply to Written Question No. 78/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 741)



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

Reply to Question No. 78/2026 is as follows:

- (a) The Yellow Ribbon Programme does not operate solely as an inmate enrolment-based Programme, rather it is a broad rehabilitation and reintegration framework comprising various programmes, activities, awareness initiatives, stakeholder engagements, and post-release support mechanisms.

Participation is, therefore, measured through involvement in various programme initiatives, including rehabilitation activities, vocational and life-skills training, employment expos, counselling support, stakeholder engagements, reintegration programmes, and post-release assistance.

The financial commitment for each financial year in question are as follows:

Financial Year	Funds Allocated (\$)	Funds Utilised (\$)
2022	200,000	195,730.32
2023	200,000	185,917.61
2024	200,000	197,242.74
2025-2026	225,000	222,776.43

Mr. Speaker, Sir, enrolment into the Yellow Ribbon Programme includes inmates participating in pre-release rehabilitation programmes, counselling sessions, vocational and life skills training, family engagement programmes, and reintegration preparation activities conducted by the Fiji Corrections Service and its stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Corrections Service acknowledges that successful rehabilitation and reintegration require a whole-of-society approach. As such, the Yellow Ribbon Programme continues to focus not only on reducing recidivism, but also on restoring dignity, promoting accountability, and providing former inmates with meaningful opportunities to become productive members of society.

- (b) Utilization of the Ex-Inmates Livelihood Support Fund and the estimated value of financial or material assistance provided directly to former inmates upon release or reintegration are as follows:

Financial Year	Types of Funds Provided (\$)	Total Funds Committed (\$)	No. of Inmates Assisted	Remarks
2021-2022	100,000	37,205.10	25	Few applications were received and processed due to COVID-19
2022-2023	100,000	67,852.53	48	Inmates need to go through relevant rehabilitation
2023-2024	100,000	83,936.76	53	

2024-2025	100,000	80,571.65	52	programmes to qualify. Approval will be based on the nature of the business required, as well as processes that are in place that they have to go through in the business sector.
2025-2026	112,500	70,987.19	38	

ANNEXURE V

Reply to Written Question No. 79/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry (Ref. Page 742)



MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, WATERWAYS & SUGAR INDUSTRY
(Hon. T.N. Tunabuna)

Reply to Question No. 79/2026 is as follows:

I welcome the opportunity to update this august House on the Ministry's digital agriculture initiative announced at the 2025 National Agriculture Show; and Youth's access to smart-farming funding and training in 2026.

(a) Status of the Ministry's Digital Agriculture Initiative as announced in the 2025 National Agriculture Show

The 2025 National Agriculture Show's theme, "Be Resilient, Produce Smart, Grow Local and Grow Agro-Tourism", reflected the reality and priorities of the Western Division, where agriculture and tourism are deeply interconnected. The Show reinforced the need to reduce Fiji's reliance on imported food for the tourism sector by strengthening local production, improving quality consistency, and increasing off-season supply.

In that context, Government allocated FJD115 million to the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways in the 2025-2026 National Budget, to fund digital modern farming practices, improve market access, and support farmers through capital programmes.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture to reconvene the National Agro-Tourism Taskforce Committee. The Taskforce, chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Tourism and Civil Aviation, has:

- met three times post-Agriculture Show 2025.
- developed a draft Agro-Tourism Policy Framework, which is now at the validation stage, led by the Ministry of Tourism in close consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry, and other relevant Government agencies.
- designed a web platform intended to serve as a one-stop information hub for hotel procurement officers, chefs, farmers, fishers, agro-processors, hotel owners, and other actors in the agro-tourism value chain. This platform remains a work in progress, and we acknowledge and thank UN FAO for its ongoing support, including the upcoming Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) that will provide technical assistance towards finalising the policy and strengthening the database and digital platform to deepen agro-tourism linkages.

E-Agriculture Strategy Nearing Completion

The Ministry's approach to digital agriculture is not *ad hoc*. Beyond individual interventions, the Ministry has developed a National E-Agriculture Strategy, which is now on the verge of completion. This Strategy will set the direction and guide the coordinated adoption of digital innovations across the sector in a sustainable way for Fiji.

Digital Initiatives as System of Addressing Two Key Bottlenecks: Off-season Supply and Quality

Following thorough consultations with actors across the agro-tourism value chain, the Ministry has identified two key drivers of continued import reliance in the tourism market:

- (1) off-season supply gaps; and
- (2) inconsistent quality.

In response, the Ministry has designed and reviewed existing programmes to address these bottlenecks by:

- scaling up protected agriculture systems (including greenhouse and hydroponics models) to increase off-season production and improve quality; realigning budget allocations to support off-season farming practices and technologies;
- strengthening farmer and value-chain training to improve reliability of supply; and
- increase and improve post-harvest technologies and system using digital technologies.

"Digital Cold Chain" Infrastructure for Agro-Processors

On the processing and supply side, the Ministry has supported cold storage, refrigerated delivery trucks, and quality crates, as they are fundamental pillars for enabling quality supply into tourism markets. Under the realigned Commercial Agriculture Development Programme, these investments constitute the physical foundation of a 'digital cold chain', a system designed to reduce post-harvest losses and maintain food quality. These facilities and vehicles become part of digital agriculture through the integration of modern systems and technologies, including improved handling protocols, traceability and inventory management approaches, and quality-control processes.

Importantly, the Ministry is ensuring that the pace of mechanisation and innovation for farmers and agro-processors progresses in parallel, so that production increases are matched with appropriate post-harvest and market-handling capacity-avoiding bottlenecks and oversupply losses.

Implementation Approach: Deliberate, Inclusive, and Sustainable

The Ministry is taking a deliberate and inclusive approach to ensure digital systems are sustainable and accessible across all regions, including the rural and maritime communities. The pace of implementation is guided by important considerations, including:

- the need to strengthen rural infrastructure, including connectivity and access;
- building digital literacy among farmers;
- integrating systems across agencies and stakeholders; and
- balancing digital transformation with priorities such as climate resilience, food security and production support.

These are not constraints, but necessary safeguards to ensure the transformation is inclusive, sustainable and effective.

Way Forward

Looking ahead, the Ministry will focus on:

- scaling up digital service delivery;
- strengthening agricultural data systems;
- enhancing real-time market access; and
- leveraging partnerships to accelerate innovation and uptake.

Government remains committed to advancing digital agriculture as a key pillar of sector transformation, ensuring Fijian farmers can participate in a modern, efficient and resilient agricultural economy.

(b) Young farmers accessing funding or training for smart-farming technology in 2026

Young farmers are not only future contributors to national food security—they are already drivers of innovation, modernisation and climate resilience. In 2026, the Ministry prioritised youth participation by expanding access to financing support, training, and exposure to practical smart-farming technologies.

Youth Supported in 2026

To-date in 2026, the Ministry has supported a total of 420 young farmers who have accessed funding support and/or training in smart-farming technology across Fiji. These programmes and activities focused on:

- rainwater harvesting,
- value addition,
- soil health,
- climate-smart agriculture practices, and
- organic agronomy.

Institutional Skills Development

To build a sustainable pipeline of climate-resilient young operators, the Ministry invested FJD4.4 million to upgrade formal youth training facilities. As a result:

- 125 young trainees are currently undertaking long-term residencies at the Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute (NATI) and the Tutu Training Centre.
- Their curriculum includes hands-on instruction in climate-smart food production, sustainable agroforestry, and business management tools.

Field Technology & Climate-Resilient Research Rollout

The Ministry's research and extension teams—supported by the Land Resource Planning and Development Division—have driven practical agritech training directly to the farm gate. Of the young farmers engaged this year:

- training has included simple, affordable climate-smart technologies such as solar-powered water pumps for drip irrigation systems, hydroponics, rainwater harvesting, and value addition; and
- young farmers have also been introduced to data-driven farming, including Sustainable Land Management practices using data from the Pacific Soil Portal, which applies digital mapping to support better fertiliser and land-use decisions.

Moving Forward in 2026 and Beyond

To sustain momentum, the Ministry has launched a NZD338,350 Collaboration Agreement through the Climate Smart Pacific Food Systems Programme, in partnership with the New Zealand Institute for Bioeconomy Science Limited (Plant & Food Research Group). Located at the Sigatoka Research Station, this collaboration will support hundreds more young people through co-designed, science-driven agricultural tracks through 2028, blending climate science with indigenous and local knowledge.

Strategic Conclusion

The Ministry's digital agriculture initiative has reached a critical transition point from pilot and design to scale and system integration.

Key achievements demonstrate strong foundations:

- (1) A near-complete National E-Agriculture Strategy to guide transformation.
- (2) Active agro-tourism integration efforts including policy development and a digital platform.
- (3) Identification of structural bottlenecks: off-season supply gaps and inconsistent quality.
- (4) Initial rollout of production technologies (protected agriculture) and post-harvest systems (digital cold chain).
- (5) Strong investment in youth engagement (420 young farmers supported, institutional training pipelines).

The challenge is no longer conceptualization - it is now about scaling, integration and investment efficiency. Without coordinated scaling, fragmented gains may fail to reduce import dependence or fully supply the tourism market.

ANNEXURE VI

Reply to Written Question No. 80/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 742)



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

Reply to Question No. 80/2026 is as follows:

- (a)&(b) At the beginning of the year, there were 16 Heads of Schools reporting to the Headquarters and as of today, they have all returned to school. They were based at the Headquarters due to allegations of misconduct, and referrals by Divisional Education Officers, Director Human Resources and Deputy Secretaries.
- (c) There are positions within the Ministry that have been restructured or abolished as part of reforms in the education administration undertaken by the previous leadership teams, whose approaches lacked vision for the Ministry. However, the Ministry remains steadfast in its commitment to due diligence and transparency by adhering strictly to the approved budgeted positions each year.

In all staff movements and recruitment exercises, the Ministry ensures that the person-to-post principle is consistently applied, thereby aligning staffing with established structures and maintaining accountability in the management of human resources. The Ministry of Education continues to face challenges with teachers who are unwilling to take up postings as per the Transfer Policy, due to personal reasons, for example, medical, family, et cetera.

As a result, these teachers remain in their current positions, while those officers who were transferred to replace them end up without placements and become surplus. Consequently, the surplus officers are required to report back to the Ministry until suitable positions can be identified for them.

These measures will ensure that resources are used efficiently, and that the Ministry's primary focus remains on improving the quality of education for all students.