

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 20TH AUGUST, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 20TH AUGUST, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.46 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Service and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics; the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport; the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts; the honourable Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports; honourable J. Usamate; honourable V. Pillay; and honourable K.K. Lal.

MINUTES

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 19th August, 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- 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 and all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast on television and the internet.

Relaunch of Booklet "Celebrating Women in Parliament 1966-2026"

For the information of honourable Members, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, the CWP Fiji Group, will hold a relaunch endeavour of the booklet "Celebrating Women in Parliament 1966-2026" today during the morning tea break. The booklet was initially launched on 3rd August, 2026, and the relaunch provides an opportunity to further acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of women who have served in Fiji's Parliament since 1966.

As part of this relaunch, CWP Fiji Group will formally hand over copies of the booklet to the Permanent Secretary for Education for distribution to 176 secondary schools across Fiji, where the booklets will be placed in school libraries. The intention of this initiative is to provide students, particularly young people, with an opportunity to learn about the women who have served in Fiji's Parliament, understand their contributions to our nation, and be inspired by their leadership and service.

The CWP Fiji Group, therefore, invites all honourable Members to be part of this special occasion, and to join us in celebrating the achievements and contributions of women parliamentarians, past and present. Your participation will help reinforce our collective

commitment to recognising Fiji's parliamentary history and encouraging the next generation to learn from and be inspired by those who have served and are serving our nation.

Committee Membership – Standing Committee on Public Accounts

For the information of honourable Members, I have received correspondence from the Government Whip, pursuant to Standing Order 115(2). Honourable Penioni Ravunawa will now be a substantive Member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Honourable Ravunawa replaces honourable Manoa Kamikamica. I thank honourable Manoa Kamikamica for his contribution as Chairman of the Standing Committee during his tenure.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate honourable Jovesa Vocea on his appointment as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and honourable Naisa Tuinaceva on his appointment as Deputy Chairman. Best wishes for a successful and impactful tenure ahead.

Voter Registration Services

Honourable Members, if you require further Voter Registration Services, please, advise the Secretary-General this morning so that necessary arrangements can be made with the Fijian Elections Office.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

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

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

- (1) Office of the President Annual Report 2017–2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 80 of 2026*)
- (2) Office of the President Annual Report 2018–2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 81 of 2026*)
- (3) Office of the President Annual Report 2019–2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 82 of 2026*)
- (4) Office of the President Annual Report 2020–2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 83 of 2026*)
- (5) Office of the President Annual Report 2021–2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 84 of 2026*)
- (6) Office of the President Annual Report 2022–2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 85 of 2026*)
- (7) Office of the President Annual Report 2023–2024 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 86 of 2026*)

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

- (1) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji – Audit Report on Municipal Councils (*Parliamentary Paper No. 91 of 2026*)
- (2) Office of the Auditor-General Annual Report 2025 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 67 of 2026*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

Levuka Town Council 2019 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 71 of 2026*)

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report - Ministry of Sugar Industry 2020-2021 Annual Report

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Ministry of Sugar Industry 2020-2021 Annual Report.

Sir, the review provided the Committee with an opportunity to examine not only the Ministry's performance during the reporting period, but also the broader structural and operational challenges affecting the sustainability of Fiji's sugar industry. Through public submissions and site visits to the Labasa Mill and key industry stakeholders in the Western Division, the Committee was able to assess issues affecting growers, mill workers and industry institutions across the sugar value chain.

The Committee acknowledges the significant level of Government support provided to the industry through stabilisation funding, fertiliser subsidies, cane cartage, cane access roads and other farmer assistance programmes. However, the Committee is concerned that this investment has not only resulted in a sustained recovery in cane production, which declined from 1.7 million tonnes in 2020 to 1.4 million tonnes in 2021, but evidence gathered during the review further highlighted a decline in grower participation, an ageing farmer population, labour shortages, low farm productivity, land tenure concerns, ageing mill infrastructure, increase in production and transportation costs, as well as climate-related risks. These challenges are interconnected and demonstrate that the future of the industry cannot be addressed through individual interventions alone, but requires a coordinated and long-term approach involving Government, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), growers and all sugar industry institutions.

Accordingly, Sir, the Committee's recommendations place particular emphasis on reversing the decline in cane production and grower participation, improving farm productivity through research and extension services, addressing the labour shortages through appropriate mechanisation, protecting productive agricultural land, and progressively modernising mill infrastructure.

The Committee also considers it important to reduce the financial and operational burden on growers through improved transportation arrangements, more timely and appropriate cane payment mechanisms, and continued access to affordable fertiliser. Strengthened grower representation, institutional governance, workforce development, and employee welfare are equally important to rebuilding confidence and improving the overall performance of the industry.

The Committee recognises that the sugar industry continues to support thousands of farmers, workers, contractors and rural households and, therefore, remains important to Fiji's social and economic development.

I acknowledge the Ministry, the key stakeholders and workers who contributed openly to the Committee's review. I also thank my fellow Committee members for their commitment and contribution to the completion of this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Report of the Auditor-General's Compliance Audit Report

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji's Compliance Audit Report.

It gives me great pleasure to present this Compliance Audit Report on two major COVID-19 relief initiatives - the COVID-19 Cash Assistance Programme and the Food Ration Distribution Programme. These Programmes were central to the Government's response to the pandemic, providing financial support and essential food supplies to households affected by lockdowns and income loss.

The COVID-19 Cash Assistance Programme was rolled out in five phases, beginning with smaller relief payments and later expanding to more substantial support. In round one, each of the 118,000 applicants received \$90, totalling \$10.8 million. This was followed by round two where 224,341 recipients were paid \$50 each, amounting to \$11.5 million. Round three provided \$50 to 205,000 applicants, totalling \$10.6 million.

The Programme then shifted to larger payouts in round four with 294,924 recipients each receiving \$360, totalling \$105.7 million. In round five, 241,347 applicants received \$360, totalling \$87.5 million. Altogether, more than 1 million applicants benefited, with over \$226 million disbursed, reflecting a progression from short-term relief to sustained household support.

We note that the Auditor-General expressed concern at the deficiencies in the Ministry of Finance's management of the COVID-19 Cash Assistance Programme (Phase 1) and the Food Ration Package Distribution Programme. However, after learning from Phase 1, better practices such as structured public communication, leveraging of technology-based payment systems and timely recovery of duplicate payments were introduced effectively.

The Food Ration Distribution Programme, implemented in two phases with expenditure amounting \$1.69 million, was audited for compliance with procurement regulations and distribution protocols. Procurement was found to be in line with guidelines and systems existed to determine ration quantities. However, weaknesses included lack of evidence of recipients, misallocation of ration packs, incomplete data verification, duplicate names in master files, inconsistencies between Ministry records and delays in delivery times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I extend my appreciation to the Office of the Auditor-General for its diligent work in producing this audit, which provided Parliament with valuable insights into the administration of Fiji's COVID-19 relief measures. The Committee acknowledges the efforts of the Ministries and agencies in delivering assistance under challenging circumstances, while stressing that corrective action is required to address the weaknesses identified. By implementing the recommendations set out in this Report, Fiji can strengthen its governance system and enhance resilience in responding to future crises.

Finally, I wish to extend our heartfelt thanks and warm wishes to our former Chairman, honourable Manoa Kamikamica. His leadership and dedication have been invaluable in guiding this Committee's oversight work during this period. His contributions will continue to inspire our commitment to accountability, transparency and resilience in service to Parliament and to the people of Fiji.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Office of the Auditor-General's 2022 Annual Report

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Office of the Auditor-General's 2022 Annual Report 2022.

It is with great pleasure that I present the Annual Report for the financial year ended 31st July, 2022. This year marked a significant period of transition and adaptation for the Office of the Auditor-General, as leadership changes coincided with ongoing challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these constraints, the Office remained steadfast in fulfilling its constitutional mandate of providing independent assurance to Parliament and the people of Fiji on the prudent use and management of public resources.

The year under review was characterised by resilience, innovation and a strong commitment to maintaining delivery service under unprecedented circumstances. Extended periods of remote work, disruptions in access to audit evidence and logistical challenges required the Office to rethink its approach to audit execution.

In response, strategic decisions were taken to reprioritise resources, particularly towards financial audit programmes, to address accumulated audit backlogs and ensure that critical audit functions continued within minimal disruption. These measures enabled the Office to stabilise operations, while gradually transforming back to more normal working conditions.

Encouragingly, the Office recorded measurable progress in improving audit completion rates, signalling a renewed emphasis on efficiency, accountability and performance. The transition to modern web-based audit tools and the strengthening of IT infrastructure played a pivotal role in enhancing productivity, enabling auditors to work flexibly across different environments. These technological advancements not only improved the quality and timeliness of audits but also laid the foundation for a more agile and digitally driven audit function in the years ahead.

Beyond operational achievements, the year also highlighted the importance of people as the Office's greatest asset. Despite workforce challenges, including staff turnover and changing work dynamics, the commitment, professionalism and adaptability demonstrated by staff were instrumental in achieving the Office's objective.

We, therefore, extend our sincere appreciation to the Executive Management staff and key stakeholders including Parliament, public entities and development partners for their

unwavering support and collaboration. Their collective efforts have strengthened the Office's ability to uphold transparency, accountability and good governance which remain fundamental to building public trust and ensuring sustainable management of national resources.

Finally, Mr. Speaker Sir, I wish to extend heartfelt thanks and warm wishes to the Members of the Committee, especially to our former Chairman, honourable Kamikamica.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Orders 121 (5), I hereby move:

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

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Report of the Auditor-Generals' Performance Audit
on the Implementation of Climate Change Adaption Actions in Fiji

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji's Performance Audit on the implementation of climate change adaptation actions in Fiji.

It gives me great pleasure to present this Performance Audit Report undertaken by the Office of the Auditor-General of Fiji as part of the global cooperative audit on climate change adaptation actions. This initiative, coordinated by the INTOSAI Development Initiative and the INTOSAI Working Group on Environmental Auditing, brought together 48 supreme audit institutions worldwide in a collective effort to examine how nations are responding to the pressing challenges of climate change.

Fiji's participation in this cooperative audit reflects our deep commitment to transparency, accountability and resilience in the face of climate risks.

Our review focused on the implementation of Fiji's National Adaptation Plan (NAP), launched in 2018, which serves as the country's strategic framework for climate change adaptation. The audit confirmed that the NAP was developed in line with international best practices and technical guidelines, with support from the NAP Global Network and financing from the Government of Canada.

However, the audit also highlighted critical gaps that must be addressed if the NAP is to achieve its intended impact. These include the absence of a monitoring and evaluation system, lack of defined indicators of success, and weaknesses in financing, leadership and coordination among

Government actors. Furthermore, while the institutional legitimacy of the NAP is clear, transparency and inclusiveness remain uncertain due to insufficient documentation of stakeholder acceptance.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening governance structures, clarifying roles and responsibilities and ensuring robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Without these enabling factors, the implementation of adaptation actions, such as community relocations and nature-based seawalls, cannot be effectively tracked or evaluated.

This Report is not only a reflection of Fiji's progress, but also a call to action. It is the Committee's hope that the insights gained will inform stronger adaptation measures, foster accountability, and contribute meaningfully to both regional and global dialogues on climate resilience. As the world reflected on the outcomes of COP-30 held in November last year, Fiji's experience formed part of the collective voice of the Pacific Nations advocating for urgent and sustained climate action.

The Committee visited the Northern Division, particularly those relocated from Vunidogoloa, Cogea and Nabavatu Villages, where it observed and assessed the effects of relocation on communities affected by rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, and seawater inundation. Given the prolonged delay relating to the Cogea Village relocation and the suffering experienced by its people, the Committee is of the view that Government must step in decisively to address these relocation issues once and for all.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I extend my appreciation to the Climate Change Department, the stakeholders, and international partners who supported this cooperative audit. Together, we must continue to build a future that is resilient, inclusive, and accountable to the people we serve.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce and Business Development and Public Enterprises.
- (2) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.
- (3) Minister for Policing and Communications.

- (4) Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General
- (5) Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade; and
- (6) Minister for Youth and Sports

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

Reinvigoration of MSME and Cooperatives Movement in Fiji

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of the Parliament, the people of Fiji who may be listening in through *Walesi* or radio or live broadcast today; *ni sa yadra vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today about something that is at the heart of Fiji's economic future - Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and our cooperative movement. They are our market vendors, shopkeepers, tailors, farmers, mechanics, electricians, food vendors, artisans, ICT entrepreneurs and small manufacturers. These are the Fijians running businesses from our villages, settlements, towns and cities. They represent 18 percent of Fiji's GDP and growing.

When we entered Government, Mr. Speaker, one of the key agenda items was genuine economic diversification. We have heard from the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs on Monday this week their acknowledgement of the efforts of economic diversification by Investment Fiji, and they are real. I shed today the light on MSMEs and cooperatives and the developments and initiatives that will take economic diversification to another level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we worked out very quickly at the Ministry when we got into office that we needed to change our approach. We needed to not only focus on providing grants but rather building a proper ecosystem based on accurate data and a deeper collaboration with private sector and development partners.

Out of this deliberate approach, Mr. Speaker, the Government launched the MSME Strategic Plan 2025-2030 in December last year, marking the formal shift to a data-driven ecosystem approach. Since the launch, the Ministry has been working with relevant Government agencies, private sector organisations and other stakeholders to turn this Strategy into practical action. It is starting to take shape.

We want a system, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that works for our entrepreneurs. The Ministry has aligned its work into eight clusters in the MSME Strategic Plan, which you all have a copy of, namely;

- (1) Data and definition;
- (2) coordination;
- (3) cooperative movement;
- (4) regulatory requirements and compliance;
- (5) entrepreneurial skills and support mechanisms;
- (6) access to finance;
- (7) market access; and
- (8) workforce skills.

These eight clusters, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are not just headings on a strategy document - they represent

the areas where we know our MSME ecosystem needs practical support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MSME Strategy acknowledges that we cannot effectively support what we probably do not understand. That is why, under Clusters 12, the Ministry has launched the new MSME portal, which is an important step in building a stronger and evidence-based approach for Government decision-making, as more Government agencies and grant programmes are integrated into the portal. It will help us better understand our MSMEs, who they are, where they are located, what sectors they operate in, what challenges they face, and what support is required. This is a part of our move towards a more data-driven and coordinated MSME support system.

In the last financial year, Mr. Speaker, the MSME Fiji Unit within the Ministry has continued to provide business advisory services, capacity building and financial assistance through our five major grant programmes. For these programmes, \$4.9 million was allocated last year. However, Mr. Speaker, the demand for assistance was significantly greater than the available resources.

During the last financial year, the Ministry received 6,305 applications, with total grant requests amounting to \$46.2 million. This clearly demonstrates two things, first, there is a very strong demand for Government assistance amongst our MSMEs and, second, there is even a greater need for us to develop alternative and sustainable financing mechanisms so that MSMEs do not become dependent on Government grants as their only source of capital. Following the assessment and due diligence process, applications were considered through relevant assessment and decision-making mechanisms, and approximately 1,806 applications, valued at close to \$6 million, were approved.

While MSME support stood at \$147 million in the 2026-2027 National Budget to MSMEs and related initiatives, access to finance remains the biggest challenge faced by our MSMEs. Hence, access to finance zeroes in on strengthening the financing environment for MSMEs. One of the key initiatives is the Access to Business Financing Act.

Through collaborative efforts with the Asian Development Bank and the Reserve Bank of Fiji, we successfully launched the small-offers regime. Whilst equity investment is expensive and complicated to access, this reform, Mr. Speaker, makes it affordable and understandable for MSMEs to access equity whilst ensuring proper due diligence is maintained.

The next step, Mr. Speaker, is the implementation of the much-anticipated peer-to-peer lending platform scheduled for December this year. We must move beyond a culture where Government support is seen as the only source of support in terms of grants.

We also recognise that money alone does not build successful business. Through Clusters 5 and 8, the Ministry has been working with relevant stakeholders across the MSME ecosystem, to foster innovation, strengthen entrepreneurship, and improve workforce capabilities. We have seen the recent launch and opening of the Innovation Hub housed at the Reserve Bank of Fiji, which provides an important platform to encourage our youth through innovation and entrepreneurship.

Mr. Speaker, you only have to think about the New Zealand Accounting Software - Xero, which started off as an IT startup at an Innovation Hub, which is now valued at, at least, NZD10 billion and this potential lies within these Innovation Hubs.

We are also continuing to work on our Ag-Hub with FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, and which we hope will strengthen our agricultural entrepreneurs in due course.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most practical areas of our work has been business training. During the 2025-2026 financial year, the Ministry conducted 27 training programmes involving 501

participants across Fiji. Of these participants, 356 were women and 145 were men. This is important because financial assistance alone does not guarantee business success.

Importantly, this work is not undertaken by the Ministry alone. For example, Mr. Speaker, we have worked with FRCS on taxation-related matters for MSMEs and with Tower Insurance on matters relating to parametric insurance. We have also had the opportunity to conduct training in Tuvalu, strengthening our regional engagement and sharing Fiji's experience in entrepreneurship development.

The Ministry has also expanded its business training initiatives to support workers returning under the PALM scheme, equipping them with knowledge and skills to establish and manage sustainable businesses on their return. Our approach is simple, Mr. Speaker, we want to build entrepreneurs, not just businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasise that the MSME Strategic Plan is not only about individual businesses - it is also about the Co-operative Movement. Our co-operatives have an important role to play in collectively creating economic opportunities, driving inclusive roles and serving as economic lifelines, particularly for communities and groups that may otherwise struggle to access markets, finance, and economies of scale.

Under Cluster 3, of the Co-operative Movement, the Ministry oversees and monitors over 1,000 active co-operatives, spanning agriculture, fisheries, retail, transport and financial services. Together, these co-operatives have an aggregate value of over \$132 million, with aggregated profits of around \$2.5 million. This is a remarkable economic footprint, Mr. Speaker, and demonstrates their vital role in sustaining grassroots economic development.

To build on this foundation and protect this economic value, we are pursuing three interconnected pillars for change and identified below:

(1) Elevating Training

We are prioritising professional management, financial literacy and robust fiduciary accountability across co-operative boards and leadership teams. We have initiated upgrades to the Co-operative College of Fiji (CCF) down in Draunibota, to create modern, conducive learning environments. We are partnering also with the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) and the Fiji National University (FNU) to secure formal institutional accreditation. This will enable the college to deliver recognised certificates and diplomas in co-operative management, serving as a direct stepping stone to higher formal tertiary training.

(2) Legal Reform, Policy Direction and Digital Transformation

Strong governance requires a modern regulatory landscape. In partnering with the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), we are conducting comprehensive reviews of the Co-operative Act, developing a national policy to establish clear targets, sector incentives and strategic benchmarks for both rural and urban co-operatives. Complementing these legal reforms is our digital transformation agenda, transitioning from legacy paper filings and manual registries to an automated system that will develop real-time compliance and monitoring, simplifying annual returns, as well as support for real-time auditing.

(3) Support

We continue to enhance the Co-operative Development Fund as our primary mechanism, something that we introduced a few years ago. These initiatives, Mr. Speaker, represent a unified strategy. We are not merely preserving the historic foundation of our Co-operative Movement, we are modernising, strengthening and positioning it to lead Fiji's

economic future. The programmes that the Ministry offers are not only reflected in the number of grants it approves - it also is reflected in the diversity and potential of the businesses being supported.

Mr. Speaker, to put things into perspective, under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IHRDP), which supports and provides assistance on a one third – two thirds funding basis, we supported an ecotourism venture in Namosi called the Eco Highland Backpackers Fiji (Pte) Limited. The business received a grant of approximately \$90,592 for the purchase of quad bikes, which will enhance its ecotourism operations and visitor experience. What is particularly encouraging about this project is that it does not operate in isolation. The business has been inspired by and is building a business relationship with the well-known Namosi Eco Retreat.

Mr. Speaker, this is precisely the type of MSME ecosystems that we want to encourage in Fiji, where one business does not simply operate alongside another business, but where businesses create linkages, share markets, develop complementary services, and create opportunities for each other. That is how we build a stronger and more resilient private sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another interesting example is the ICT and Bakery Project undertaken by the Uluimatobu Cooperative on Moala Island in Lau. This is a unique combination of traditional community-based enterprise with modern activities. Through IHRDP assistance, their Cooperative is being supported in completing its bakery operations, while enhancing its ICT hub.

Mr. Speaker, this project demonstrates that MSME development cannot be confined to Suva, Nadi, Lautoka, or major urban centres. We must ensure that opportunities reach our islands, rural communities, and remote areas. I look forward to visiting some of these projects myself and seeing firsthand the progress being made by these entrepreneurs and communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2025-2026 financial year has been an important year for the MSME Cooperative Movement, we have –

- strengthened direct financial assistance;
- expanded capacity building;
- taken steps towards improving access to finance;
- strengthened partnerships with the private sector, financial institutions, development partners and other Government agencies; and most importantly;
- taken the first major steps towards building a coordinated MSME ecosystem under the MSME Strategic Plan 2025-2030, of which copies are left on each Member's desk.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our goal is for MSMEs to contribute, at least, 40 percent of our GDP. There is, of course, much more to do. The Government believes that every Fijian should have the opportunity to participate in our economy, whether they are operating a business from a market stall in Suva, or a workshop in Labasa, or a farm in Vanua Levu, or a tourism venture in Namosi, or an ICT and bakery enterprise on an island such as Moala.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are reinvigorating the MSME Cooperative Movement in Fiji, moving from isolated interventions to an ecosystem approach. We are connecting –

- data with policy;
- entrepreneurs with finance;
- business with markets;
- skills with employment;
- innovation with commercial opportunity; and

- the government with the private sector, financial institutions and development partners, academia, and our communities.

That is what the MSME Strategic Plan 2025-2030 is designed to achieve.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not simply reinvigorating Government programmes - we are reinvigorating the entire nation through this initiative. We are enabling the environment where an idea can become a business, where a small business can become a growing enterprise, where a cooperative can become a sustainable economic institution.

Before I end my Statement, I wish to place on record my deepest appreciation to the Ministry and all our valued stakeholders for holding the fort and steering the ship in my absence. Your unwavering commitment has ensured that the implementation of the MSME Strategic Plan 2025-2030 has continued with purpose, momentum, and tangible achievements are already being realised.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to the honourable Minister of Finance and the Assistant Minister for Industries, Commerce and Business Development, for their leadership and support and commitment in carrying forward this important work during my absence.

With those words said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may God bless the MSME and Cooperative Movement in Fiji, may God bless Fiji, and may God bless us all.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will now invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition, or he is designated, for his response.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome what the honourable Minister has said this morning in Parliament and the MSME Strategic Plan 2025-2030. A national MSME portal, expanded business training and small office regime under the Access to Business Financing Act, a peer-to-peer lending platform and a reform of the Cooperative Development Fund is welcomed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on paper, these are sound and necessary steps. Any plan that helps a market vendor in Sigatoka, a small transport operator in Labasa or a women's cooperative in the Maritime Islands, access finance and training deserves this side support in principle, and both sides of the House agree. However, Sir, we also need to applaud the resilience of our MSMEs and because of them we were one of the fastest growing economies in the world after the pandemic. What we need to work on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to ensure that we create an environment where these MSMEs thrive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you walk down any street in Suva, Nadi and Lautoka and ask a small business owner, what keeps them up at night? One of them is not because of the shortage of training modules, but one of them is commercial rents that have climbed beyond what a modest retail margin can carry. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is watching their own CCTV footage, their shops being broken, stocks stolen, security grills bent and facing the added cost of repairs and higher premiums. With what confidence that these perpetrators will ever be held to account or to be held accountable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are some of the realities of the MSMEs that this Statement does not mention. While we speak of growing MSMEs to 40 percent of the GDP, we must be honest about who is left to run them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think one of the most challenging issues for any government is the migration numbers, and I would like to quote something from *Fiji Times* and I quote, "...1,295 residents leave for employment in July 2026'.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a worrisome matter for the whole of the nation, and you cannot build a resilient workforce when experienced hands are boarding flights. A strategic plan for 2030 means little, if the skills base it depends on has already left the country by 2027.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I say this to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister in the spirit of genuine partnership, not political point scoring - policies must enable businesses, not merely administer it. So, today I call on this Government to –

- Match its training initiatives with tax relief that allows small businesses to keep what it earns.
- Review the VAT burden on essential goods and small trader turnover.
- Work with local authorities and landlords so that a young entrepreneur is not priced out before they open their doors.
- Put real resourcing behind community police and rapid response for break-ins because a business owner who has been robbed twice this year does not need a seminar. They need to feel safe enough to keep their shutters open.
- Build a genuine retention strategy alongside our migration policies and mentor our youth and help them to build an environment here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I openly welcome the innovation hub, but on the other hand as the Opposition, I have always advocated for innovation summit which the honourable Minister can probably implement next year. However, let us be clear in this House, Sir. We do not oppose the ambition in the Statement. We challenge this Government to match the ambition with the courage to fix what is actually strangling our MSMEs and this Strategic Plan must ensure that businesses have healthy balanced sheets to be able to absorb domestic and global economic shocks.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has stated that one of the greatest challenges for MSMEs is access to finance, but I would like to defer a bit and add to that. I think one of the greatest challenges for MSMEs, when you want to start a business or when you want to diversify and invest is you need land, and land requires security, especially from the banks.

The last point I would like to raise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the uncertainty around land leases when diversifying and investing. For example, a smallholder farmer has been told his lease would not be renewed and that is the example I am coming from. So, I feel that uncertainty around land leases has held this nation back for decades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, any government that solves the uncertainty around land leases will see Fiji's economy grow exponentially. I would like to share two things with the honourable Deputy Prime Minister. The 2013 Constitution ensures that land will forever be protected, and that is the first step. The second step, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is investment in these land. So, I urge the Deputy Prime Minister to conduct capacity-building trainings with landowning units and iTLTB around governance, diversification, economic opportunities and potential.

Mr. Speaker, we create certainty around leases, that is, security for banks, confidence for the investors and more monetary wealth for all Fijians. *Vinaka* and thank you for the time.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend our proceedings for our morning team. I am reminding Members once more of the CWP Fiji Group's invitation. The Parliament is suspended for half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.45 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.20 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it has been agreed by the two Ministers who are going to deliver their Statements that they will swap. I believe, honourable Minister for Policing and Communications has an urgent engagement, so we will allow the honourable Naivalurua to deliver his Statement first before I call on the honourable Deputy Prime Minister to follow.

Update on Government's Digital Transformation

HON. I. NAIVALURUA. – *Ni sa yadra saka na Turaga na Speaker*. I rise today to provide an update to this august House on the exciting leaps been made by Government in building a beyond-connected, digitally enabled and cyber-secure Fiji.

Firstly, I will outline the work this Ministry has delivered and the work now underway. Secondly, I will update this House on the progress of Phase 1 in connecting our people across the six Provinces who have been unconnected, and the next phase of that work. Thirdly, I will report on the digital transformation and cyber-security cooperation being advanced under the elevated Vuvale Union.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our work as a Ministry stands on three pillars of our National Development Plan and, that is, economic resilience, people empowerment and good governance. This is implemented through our National Digital Strategy 2025-2030 and the National Security and Resilience Strategy 2026-2031.

Since the launch of the two Strategies, Mr. Speaker, we have moved from ambition to action, as follows:

- (1) We delivered a national privacy and personal data protection policy anchored by eight data protection principles that put every Fijian's privacy first.
- (2) We stood up a National Computer Emergency Response Team, known as CERT, already helping organisations recover swiftly from cyber incidents.
- (3) We strengthened our Government Data Centre and stood it up with 24-7 Government Network and Security Operations Centre, simply meaning eyes on digital borders every hour of every day.
- (4) We rolled out 5G technology, progressively connecting our people to faster, more resilient digital infrastructure. We delivered our National Cybersecurity Website, one trusted home for Fijians to turn to for guidance on reporting a cyber incident or online hump and cyber information.
- (5) On the world stage, Mr. Speaker, Fiji became the first Pacific nation and, 50th globally, to sign the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention. Once ratified, it will give our law enforcement faster international cooperation to pursue cyber criminals across borders.
- (6) We stood at the negotiating table for three years on the first-ever United Nations Convention Against Cybercrime and signed it last year, giving the Pacific a voice in shaping the rules of cyberspace.

Mr. Speaker, work continues. We are finalising a whole of Government services mapping, 788 services identified across the Ministries and agencies. We are completing a review of the Government ITC systems, networks and procurement. Our online safety law review is advancing with strong focus on protecting our children online and our telecommunication law is undergoing consultation and will go to Cabinet soon, then to this Parliament.

We advanced our National Identification Initiative, which will build on the digitalFIJI digital

e-profile, scheduled to be tabled to Parliament next month, giving every Fijian one secure identity when accessing government health, financial and social services. Last but not least, our data protection law, aligned to Convention 108+, is progressing as well. Once this is completed, we will move on to amending our cybercrime law.

Mr. Speaker, moving into Universal Service Connecting the Unconnected Programme, in the last seven months, 90 communities in Lau, Lomaiviti, Namosi, Navosa and Kadavu now have access to connectivity. That is a total of over 8,200 Fijians who now have access to the internet. That is 75 percent of Phase 1 completed. The remaining 26 communities also include Tailevu. Twenty-five sites will be completed by the end of this month, with the last area being completed by September.

Mr. Speaker, let me go a level lower –

- 29 areas across Lomaiviti, Namosi, Navosa have been connected by Telecom Fiji Limited, benefiting almost 2,834 Fijians.
- 32 areas across Lau have been connected by Digicel, benefiting nearly 3,167 Fijians.
- 39 areas in Kadavu have been connected by Vodafone, benefiting around 2,281 Fijians and the official launch will take place next month.

Mr. Speaker, the appetite for this newfound connectivity has been extraordinary. In July alone of this year, people in Lomaiviti Namosi, Navosa and Lau consumed 49 terabytes of data, and they did so on a network that held 95.6 percent availability, even though most of the sites were on solar power.

Mr. Speaker, 49 terabytes is huge. It is enough to stream high-definition (HD) videos non-stop, 24 hours a day, for over 680 days, without ever switching it off. This shows the pent-up demand of our unconnected people finally being met by this Government and for many of them, for the first time, being able to go online, learn, do business and connect with distant friends and family.

Mr. Speaker, I only hope they are all watching the good stuff, especially for my friends from Lomaiviti.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, connectivity alone is not enough. Our focus has been beyond connected. We are building local capability. This means that the local community has been trained to help if the internet goes down or there is a technical issue. Women and youth groups are running the internet voucher system in these communities, managing sales. When Government connects a community or village, we are not just switching on the internet. Government is opening a door to opportunity and our people in these communities taking charge of walking through it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Phase 1 has also taught us something important. We connected areas that were part of the national power grid and other areas we powered by solar from the start. However, we found that even grid connected sites even faced unreliable power causing outages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going forward for Phase 1, power grid sites, every site, will be fitted with solar power.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Phase 2 work has already begun. A tender for Phase 2 covering a further 104 areas is currently open. This will complete the rollout across 13 Provinces and covering approximately 5,761 households and 23,816 Fijians. That is for Phase 2 alone.

To prepare for future phases, my Ministry wrote to the Office of the Solicitor General last week for a further 311 Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF) verified communities that need connectivity. All 311 communities went through a careful five-stage review to make sure that the process was fair, technically sound and transparent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once presented, these communities will form Phases 3, 4 and 5 with rollout beginning this fiscal year. Just to give you an idea what this means on its impact to the community, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will impact on 12,101 households, impacting on the population of 46,840.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of our commitment to building a digitally skilled and inclusive Fiji, we are creating opportunities for our young people to experience emerging digital technologies and innovation. Earlier this month, five young girls aged 15 to 17 who are part of our Girls in ICT programme, proudly represented Fiji at the International CyberWizarrd 2026 Boot Camp in Estonia, marking Fiji's first participation in this global programme. Their participation reflects our commitment to developing the next generation of digital leaders and strengthening national cyber resilience through investment in youth skills and opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue with our Girls in ICT programme this year and continue to provide tailored cyber programmes for our young women. This is a key priority under our national development plan and our strategies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the final update is regarding the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union's work on digital cooperation. We remain committed to defending our digital lifelines, our networks, our data, our critical infrastructure, and to harness the opportunities of these technologies. This work is already happening, as our national search has been facilitating cyber drills with agencies and ministries. This week, we are focussing on our health sector and making sure that they are equipped to handle cyber incidents.

Next month, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a study visit to Australia to discuss our critical infrastructure work. Looking ahead, Sir, the work I have outlined today reflects our national agenda. The areas we are empowering our societies by connecting communities meaningfully. We are strengthening our digital infrastructure. We are mapping and redesigning government services. We will build trusted digital identities. We are strengthening cybersecurity and digital trust. We are investing in the next generation of Fijians who will drive our digital economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *vinaka saka vakalevu* and May God Bless Fiji.

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

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications for his Ministerial Statement, updating Parliament on the Government's digital transformation, including the work undertaken on the digital front, rural connectivity and Fiji's digital transformation and cybersecurity cooperation under the Vuvale Partnership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Opposition's perspective, we recognise that digital transformation is necessary. Technology is changing the way Governments operate, business provides services, and ordinary people communicate and access information.

Fiji cannot afford to be left behind. However, our concern must always be whether this transformation is producing practical improvements in the daily lives of ordinary Fijians. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can introduce new digital platforms and announce new initiatives, but these

developments mean very little to a family living in a rural or maritime community if they still cannot access reliable and affordable internet services.

The honourable Minister has referred to progress in rural connectivity, and we really appreciate this. This is an area where the Opposition believes Government must continue to place considerable attention because the digital divide between our urban centres and many rural and maritime communities remains an important development issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, connectivity today is no longer simply about having access to social media. Reliable internet access affects education, employment, business, banking, communication, and access to government services. As more government services move online, we must ensure people without reliable connectivity are not unintentionally excluded from those services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is particularly important for our elderly citizens, patients with disabilities, and Fijians who may not have the same level of digital literacy. Government cannot simply digitise a service and assume that everyone will automatically be able to access it. Digital transformation must be accompanied by public education, accessible systems, and continued alternatives for those who cannot easily use online services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another important issue raised in this ministerial statement is cyber security cooperation. As Fiji becomes increasingly dependent on technology, the risks associated with cybercrime, fraud, identity theft, and attacks on important systems will also increase. The Opposition therefore believes that cyber security must be treated as an essential part of our national security and not simply as an IT matter. Government agencies hold significant amounts of personal and confidential information belonging to Fijians.

People must have confidence that when they provide their personal information to government, appropriate safeguards are in place to protect that information. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, digital transformation must deliver value for taxpayers. Government should be transparent about what is being spent on digital projects, what has actually been delivered, and whether these investments are improving the efficiency of public services.

The success of digital transformation should not be measured by the number of programmes announced, but by whether Fijians are receiving faster, easier, and more reliable services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Opposition side, we will support initiatives that genuinely modernise Fiji and improve access to services, but our responsibility is also to ensure that government remains accountable for the money being spent and that no community is left behind in this transition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the objective should ultimately be straightforward. Digital transformation must work for everyone. A person living in a rural community should have the opportunity to benefit from technology, just as someone living in Suva, Lautoka Nadi areas. As the honourable Minister mentioned, so many other interior parts of Fiji have been modernised, and the technology has been put in there.

HON. V. LAL.- We really appreciate that. And our systems must be secure, our citizens' information must be protected, and the government must ensure that technology makes public services more accessible rather than creating another barrier to access in them. That is the standard by which we should measure Fiji's digital transformation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, sir.

MR. SPEAKER. - Thank you, honourable Virendra Lal, in delivering the Opposition's response. Honourable Minister, you are excused to attend your engagement.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to update the House on the work of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation in advancing gender equality, disability, and social inclusion, which we and our partners call, GEDSI.

Tourism and Civil Aviation are the twin engines of our national economy. Together, they employ a large share of our working population, and they are the face Fiji presents to the world. How inclusively these two sectors operate is not a side matter. It goes to the heart of whether the benefits of a growth are shared fairly among all Fijians - women and men, persons with disabilities, young people in the rural and maritime communities we serve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, GEDSI is a principle that when Government designs a policy, a programme, or a workplace, it must ask; who might be left out? Then design the response so that no one is. For this Ministry, it means asking a plain set of questions about every policy and programme we run. Who takes part? Who benefits? Who faces barriers? What critical steps will remove those barriers?

It is not a separate project that sits on one side. It is built into how we plan, budget, consult, deliver and monitor our work across both Departments. Put simply, as tourism and aviation grow, the opportunities and benefits of the growth should reach as many Fijians as possible, and no community or group should be left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the vision of this Ministry is a sustainable and resilient Fiji tourism and aviation industry that adds value to the local community. That vision cannot be matched if someone cannot take part in, reach, or benefit from what these sectors offer. The connection runs three ways:

- (1) Sustainable tourism must be inclusive tourism. Growth should create opportunities beyond the major operators and establish destinations in the Western Division. Women, persons with disabilities, youth, micro, small, and medium enterprises, and community-based enterprises in rural and maritime areas should have a real place in the tourism economy. This is why the National Sustainable Tourism Framework 2024-2033 sets out a sector that supports community development and shares opportunity fairly.
- (2) An inclusive aviation system strengthens connectivity and resilience. Civilization is not only aircraft and airports. It connects people to jobs, markets, education and services. Applying GEDSI means asking whether our aviation policies, facilities, information, and services work for every user, including persons with disabilities, older persons, families and people in remote and maritime communities. The Civil Aviation Master Plan 2026-2031 sets out to widen access to air services for all Fijians, including remote communities.
- (3) Adding value must include social and community value, not economic growth alone. The message is not only how much these sectors grow, but who takes part and who benefits. That question matters now because our current investments reach tourism, MSMEs, community-based enterprises and domestic air lanes in maritime communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me get to the work already underway, beginning with tourism. On disability inclusion, the Ministry is advancing accessible tourism in partnership with the Fiji Disabled People's Federation. We have delivered disability sensitization training to employers and staff across the tourism areas and sectors. This training builds awareness of different types of disability and access requirements, helps operators identify the barriers persons with disabilities face, and promote reasonable accommodation so that facilities, services and jobs are within reach. To this date, around 40 participants have completed this training.

Alongside the training, we have carried out accessibility audit at selected hotels and tourist attractions to assess how accessible the infrastructure, facilities and services in order to identify where improvements are needed. The aim of accessible tourism is not only that visitors with disabilities can travel with dignity and independence, but that persons with disabilities find employment and enterprise within the sector itself. An accessible Fiji is also a stronger destination, a better place to serve the growing global market of travellers with access needs.

On women's economic empowerment, women already make up a large part of the tourism workforce, with more women than men employed in the sector. We are seeing steady growth of women starting and running tourism businesses and rising numbers of women reaching finance and business support, particularly in community-based tourism. Tourism gives women a route to earn income, build a lasting enterprise business, support their families and strengthen their communities. The Ministry will keep working towards a tourism sector where women, especially in rural and maritime communities, have fair access to employment, entrepreneurship, leadership and a wider value chain.

On social inclusion, our outreach team works directly with communities across Fiji, including rural, remote and maritime communities, to open tourism opportunities where they have been hardest to reach. This carries tourism beyond the traditional hotspots so that its benefits reach the whole country. Through research, awareness, capacity building and engagement, we work to lower the barriers that keep communities, women, youth and persons with disabilities from taking part.

Mr. Speaker, in the aviation side, this work has a firm anchor in our own sector planning. Recommendation 56 of the Civil Aviation Master Plan for Fiji, covering 2026 to 2031, calls on Government to set a realistic timeframe for State-Owned Enterprises in aviation and tourism to reach at least 2 percent of their workforce, comprising persons with physical disabilities in workplaces properly equipped to support them.

The recommendation is a foundation of a programme titled, “Strengthening Inclusive Employment for Persons with Disabilities in State-Owned Enterprises”. It runs for 12 months from May 2026 to May 2027, and its goal is to reach at least 2 percent employment of persons with disabilities across our aviation and tourism State-Owned Enterprises by 2029.

Within these 12 months, we are targeting accessibility audits at our major airports and at the Headquarters of Fiji Airways and Fiji Airports. Sensitisation of our senior State-Owned Enterprise executives. On the place for inclusive hiring, certification of about 120 human resources, middle management staff, inclusive recruitment, and a supported recruitment pilot to bring about 50 persons with disabilities into aviation and tourism roles, with half of those places set aside for women.

Mr. Speaker, this is definitely a whole-of-society effort. It is guided by a project steering committee chaired by the Ministry and co-chaired by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, with the:

- (1) Fiji Disabled People's Federation;
- (2) National Council for Persons with Disabilities;
- (3) Fiji Airways;
- (4) Fiji Airports Limited
- (5) Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation;
- (6) Ministry of Employment and Industrial Relations, and
- (7) Australian High Commission.

It is built on the principle that our disability community has long held, ‘Nothing about us without us’.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on funding, I can be precise. I will confirm myself to what is confirmed. The aviation programme is funded by a grant of AUD100,000 or approximately FJD 145,000 from the Australian Government. It is provided through the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and administered through the Fiji Programme Support Platform under the GEDSI Flexible Fund.

It pays for accessibility audits and minor accessibility improvements, technical advice on universal design, training for executives and staff, and the capital and logistics to deliver the work across our airport and State-Owned Enterprises. No additional funding is required from Fiji's national budget for this particular programme. The arrangement was reviewed by the Office of the Solicitor-General and endorsed by cabinet earlier this year.

On the tourism side, all inclusive work is supported through the Government's Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting System. For the past two financial years, an allocation of \$400,000 has funded the Tourism MSME Grant Programme, and in the last financial year, a further \$24,330 funded accessibility audits at selected tourism attractions and hotels. The pilot has shown strong demand, especially from women and youth entrepreneurs, and rising interest from rural and community-based enterprises. I will place the participant figures on record shortly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also examining, as a long-term matter, whether the definition of disability in section 84(4) of the Employment Relations Act 2007 should be widened to include sensory, intellectual and psychosocial conditions, and not physical empowerment alone. I want to be clear with the House - this is a medium-term undertaking. It is not the focus of the programme now underway, and any change of that kind will come back to the House through the proper legislative process, after consultation with stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, none of this stands alone. Our tourism and aviation work gives practical effect to the Fiji National Development Plan and its commitment to inclusive growth. It supports the National Policy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2033 and the National Gender Policy. It draws on the National Sustainable Tourism Framework 2024-2034, and the Civil Aviation Master Plan 2026-2031. It supports the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability, and it upholds Fiji's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It contributes to two Sustainable Development Goal commitments - Goal 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth and Goal 10 on Reduced Inequalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House expects that the figures I placed on the record are accurate and properly sourced. I will hold to that. The figures I can confirm today are drawn from our signed agreement with the Fiji Programme Support Platform, from Cabinet's endorsement, and from our verified programme data.

On disability inclusion, around 40 employees from the tourism and aviation sectors have complete the disability sensitisation training and accessibility audits have been carried out at four tourism facilities, including one hotel and three tourist attractions, and at Nadi International Airport.

On the Tourism MSME Grant Programme, the application date for the 2025-2026 financial year shows that women-led projects made up 47 percent of applicants, which points to real demand from women when finance is within reach.

The employment profile of applicant enterprises is balanced across gender and weighted toward youth, and the projected unemployment from proposed projects points to notable new opportunities for young women, in particular.

On the wider scale of the disability employment gap across tourism and aviation, my Ministry is finishing a verified set of figures through the Bureau of Statistics and the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation. Rather than place provisional numbers before this House, I will return with those figures once the verification is complete. What I can say today is that the gap is real, it is significant, and it is the reason this work exists.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, this Ministry is committed to making Fiji's tourism and aviation sectors - the twin engines of our economy, into engines of inclusion as well. We will keep reporting progress to this House as this work moves from audit and training into recruitment, enterprise and lasting change in how our sectors employ and serve the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the House. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation for his Ministerial Statement. The Minister's Statement places particular emphasis on disability-inclusive employment, women's economic empowerment and expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities within the tourism and civil aviation sectors. These are important objectives, and from the Opposition side, we support genuine efforts that allow more Fijians to participate meaningfully in our economy, regardless of gender, disability, or where they come from.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tourism remains one of Fiji's most important industries and provides employment and income to thousands of families. As the sector continues to develop, persons with disabilities should not be left behind. Disability-inclusive employment must mean creating real opportunities for persons with disabilities to enter the workforce, receive appropriate training, develop their skills, and progress in their careers. The same principle should apply within our civil aviation sector and all the other sectors.

Similarly, women's economic empowerment must remain an important part of our development. We should continue creating an environment where women can participate not only as employees, but also as business owners, managers and decision makers. This is particularly important for women in our rural and maritime communities, whose participation is also recognised in the honourable Minister's statement.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when Government speaks about inclusion, we should also look at the institutions and statutory bodies responsible for making decisions in these various sectors. I, therefore, ask, how many women are currently represented on the Tourism Fiji Board and on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Board? How many persons with disabilities are represented on these two Boards?

These are important questions, because inclusion cannot be measured only by programmes and employment initiatives - it should also be reflected at the decision-making level. If we are encouraging tourism operators and aviation stakeholders to provide opportunities to persons with disabilities, then Government should lead by example through appointments to boards, advisory councils and committees. Persons with disabilities should have opportunities to contribute directly to decisions concerning accessibility, tourism development, transport, aviation, and other services that affect their lives. The same applies to women. Women economic empowerment should not stop at employment or small businesses' participation - we should see women represented at senior levels and on boards and advisory councils where major decisions concerning the future of these industries are made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, representation matters because people bring different experiences to the

decision-making table. A person living with a disability may identify accessibility barriers that others may never have experienced. A woman operating a small tourism enterprise in a rural and maritime community may bring a completely different perspective from those traditionally involved in policy development. Therefore, as Government speaks about accessibility and inclusive recruitment, we encourage the honourable Minister to extend that commitment to Government appointments and advisory structures. I would also encourage the honourable Minister to provide Parliament with current gender and disability representation on the Tourism Fiji board and CAAF Board and tell us what targets, if any, Government has established to improve the representation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should reach a point where persons with disabilities and women are not simply consulted after policies have been developed but are actively involved in shaping those policies from the beginning. The Opposition supports genuine measures that create employment, economic opportunities, and meaningful participation for women and persons living with disabilities. Inclusion must be visible, not only in the workforce, but must also be visible around the tables where decisions are made. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank honourable Hem Chand for the Opposition's response.

Honourable Members, another musical chair here, the honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs has an urgent bilateral meeting in another half an hour or so, and I think the honourable Minister for Justice has kindly consented for him to speak first before he does. I will now invite the honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, to deliver his Statement.

A Vision of Active, Independent and Practical Diplomacy
Anchored Firmly in Fiji's National Interest

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I rise today to update this honourable House on the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade on the direction in which this Government is taking Fiji's engagement with the world.

On this side of the House, we believe foreign policy must produce results our people can see and feel in their daily lives. Our engagements abroad should open markets for our farmers, manufacturers and exporters. They should bring investment into Fiji, create employment and generate opportunities for our businesses and our people. They should help secure our energy needs, strengthen our supply chains and build greater resilience in our economy. They must also protect Fiji's sovereignty, look after our citizens overseas and allow us to contribute meaningfully to the peace and security of our Pacific region.

Following Parliament's consideration of the 2026-2027 national budget, our focus has moved firmly towards implementation. Our Missions have been reminded of the need for prudent financial management and budget discipline, but also that they are there to deliver for Fiji, pursuing trade, investment and development opportunities, supporting our exporters, assisting Fijians overseas and representing Fiji's interests effectively. This direction is consistent with Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper and our national development plan.

Our international relationships must support the development priorities we have set for ourselves here at home. Our Missions are, therefore, not simply diplomatic posts, they are extensions of Fiji's national development effort. They have access to Governments, businesses, investors, development institutions, universities and technology providers. They must understand what Fiji needs and actively look for opportunities that can help us meet those needs, but opening a door

overseas is only one part of the job. We must be organised here at home to walk through that door.

Government agencies and the private sector need to work seamlessly together so that opportunities identified overseas do not simply end up in diplomatic reports or meeting records. If a Mission identifies an investor, it must quickly connect that investor with the right people in Fiji. If we open a market, our exporters must be ready to use it. If our partner offers technology, expertise or financing, we must know which national priority it can support. This is how diplomacy becomes developed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, trade and investment remain central to that effort. Fiji participated as an observer at the second Future Investment and Trade Partnership (FITP) Ministerial Meeting in Auckland in July, engaging partners on trade barriers, resilient supply chains, digital trade and regulatory cooperation. On the margins of that meeting, I met New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Investment, the Honourable Todd MacLean, who reaffirmed the ambitious objective of achieving NZD2 billion in annual two-way trade by 2030 under the Fiji New Zealand Duavata Partnership. It is a worthwhile ambition, but on this side of the House, we are clear about what success must mean for Fiji.

Fiji currently exports approximately \$150 million worth of goods to New Zealand, while importing approximately \$1.03 billion. Simply, increasing our two-way trade is, therefore, not enough. We must substantially increase Fiji's share of that relationship.

Kava is a good example. Standards, biosecurity requirements and regulatory arrangements may sound like technical trade matters, but somewhere in the rural Fiji, a farmer is planting *yaqona* and their family depends on that crop. Diplomacy helps resolve the market access issue for kava or *yaqona*. It can mean another buyer, another order, and another source of income for Fijian households. That is a connection this Government wants our economic diplomacy to make.

Our recent engagement in Malaysia and the Republic of Korea formed part of the same effort. In Malaysia, we marked an important new chapter by reopening Fiji's Diplomatic Mission in Kuala Lumpur. We did not reopen Kuala Lumpur simply to put the Fiji flag back on the building but Malaysia matters to Fiji. It is an important ASEAN economy, offering opportunities in trade, investment, tourism, education, technology and energy.

In 2024, Fiji exported approximately USD4.5 million in goods to Malaysia while importing approximately USD115 million, driven largely by fuel and related imports. Our presence there must be purposeful. The Mission must strengthen our political relationship while actively seeking opportunities for Fijian exporters, connecting our businesses with Malaysian counterparts and identifying credible investment. I am pleased to share that during the visit, we managed to set up the Malaysia-Fiji Business Council, and we hope that our counterpart in Fiji will also set up the Fiji-Malaysia Business Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our return to Kuala Lumpur and our recent engagement in Seoul also reminded us of something about diplomacy that we should not forget - relationships require attention. They cannot simply be switched off and then expected to resume years later, exactly where we left them. In both capitals, we were disappointed that Fiji had stepped back from relationships our partners continued to value. These were friendships, and they are still friendships built over many years, and our partners had invested considerable goodwill in Fiji.

There is a lesson in that. You always hear from the Opposition that during COVID-19, Fiji Airways came under enormous pressure and calls to reduce the airline substantially, raising serious questions about its future and the Government of the day. All credit to them, nevertheless recognised

that Fiji Airways was a strategic national asset and that losing that capability would make rebuilding it later difficult and expensive.

On that principle, they were right, Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, it does also raise a legitimate question. Why was the same strategic thinking not applied to Fiji's diplomatic presence in Kuala Lumpur, Seoul and Brussels? These are not insignificant centres. Malaysia sits at the heart of ASEAN. Seoul is capital of one of the world's major economies and a longstanding development partner. Brussels places Fiji at the center of our engagement with the European Union and important trade and development relationships.

We understand that these decisions were taken during COVID-19 and Fiji faced severe economic and fiscal pressure, however, if the economy could not afford to maintain those Missions at the time, then they should have acknowledged it for what it was. COVID itself does not remove the strategic importance of diplomatic relationships. Diplomacy does not cease because aircraft stopped flying. Indeed, periods of international crisis occur precisely when relationships between countries matter the most and once diplomatic presence is withdrawn, there is a cost.

There is a cost, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that cannot always be entered neatly into a spreadsheet. Relationships cool, institutional connections weaken, opportunities are missed, and partners can reasonably begin to ask whether Fiji still values the relationship the same way they do. We encountered some of that, firsthand. Some honourable Members sitting on the opposite side today were members of the government when those decisions were taken. They may well had reasons for making them, and they are entitled to explain those reasons.

This side of the House has chosen to look at our diplomatic network differently. A Mission certainly costs money, and every Mission must justify that expenditure. However, a Mission is also a strategic national asset. The question should, therefore, not only be, what does this Mission cost Fiji? We should also ask, what can Fiji make this Mission deliver? This is why our return to Kuala Lumpur must have purpose, and why we are looking at how Fiji can strengthen its engagement with Korea after 55 years of diplomatic relations.

If you are going back, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you must go back with purpose. Recent international disruptions have reminded us of how exposed a small important economy like Fiji can be to events far beyond our shores. Disruptions elsewhere can affect fuel prices, shipping, aviation, and electricity generation in Fiji, and eventually they will reach families trying to manage their household budgets. Energy security is, therefore, a matter of national resilience.

In Kuala Lumpur, Fiji held discussions with Malaysia's Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry and PETRONAS, on practical cooperation in fuel security. Those discussions covered possible regional storage and stockpiling arrangements, options around prepositioned fuel storage and technical support for Fiji's planned National Security Strategy. Renewable energy and sustainable biofuels were also discussed.

In Korea, discussions were held with senior representatives of the Korean Government and the Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC), which has considerable experience in strategic petroleum reserves and national fuel security planning. It was agreed that Fiji's Department of Energy and KNOC should begin technical discussions on strategic fuel reserve planning and related cooperation.

This is the kind of engagement that this side of the House believes our diplomacy should pursue - identify a national vulnerability, find partners with capability to assist, and translate those relationships into practical cooperation.

There is also a regional dimension. Fiji is a fuel and logistics hub for much of the Pacific. Greater storage and supply resilience here strengthens our ability to support neighbouring countries whose supply chains depend upon Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacific Islands Forum Minister's met in Suva on 7th August to finalise the agenda for the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting in Palau. Ministers also discussed recent missile activity in our wider region.

Fiji's position was straightforward. We respect the State's sovereign right to maintain its defence capabilities. However, advanced notification of missile testing in our neighbourhood is a basic transparency and good practice between neighbours.

This speaks directly to what Fiji means by an Ocean of Peace. For us, it means a Pacific where dialogue is preferred over confrontation, where sovereignty and international law are respected, and where Pacific countries retain the freedom to maintain relationships with partners who respect their sovereignty and contribute constructively to their wellbeing.

The Pacific should not be forced to divide itself into someone else's geopolitical camp. Friendship with one country does not require hostility towards another. Our responsibility is first and foremost to Fiji and to the peace, security and prosperity of the Blue Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji continues to advocate strongly for climate action and for keeping the 1.5-degree target alive. Later this year, Fiji will host the UNFCCC Pre-COP 31 Meeting in Nadi. This brings global climate decision-makers into the Pacific and closer to communities living with the consequences of climate change. There is a difference between discussing climate change thousands of kilometres away and standing in communities experiencing sea-level rise, extreme weather, and changing climate patterns. For a few days, Ministers, Heads of Governments, negotiators, and senior officials will be here. They will hear directly from Pacific people and see what they are negotiating about.

Some have suggested that Fiji is somehow dependent on Australia to host this Meeting. Let us be clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not Fiji's first. Australia is an important partner, yes, and this Government appreciates that partnership, but Fiji is a host. We have hosted major regional and international meetings before and will do so again. Partnership does not mean dependency. Fiji will use this meeting to ensure that Pacific priorities, experiences and solutions remain firmly before the international community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, practical diplomacy also includes partnerships that help Fiji address serious domestic challenges. During the Pacific Islands Forum Ministers' Meeting, Australian Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong announced \$23.5 million in support for Fiji's national response to HIV under the Vuvale Partnership. That support strengthens the response Fiji has already put in place, including prevention, health worker training, community outreach, and essential supplies. It does not replace our effort - it reinforces it. This is a partnership model this side of the House supports. Fiji identifies a priority and leads the response while our partners strengthen our capacity to deliver. The same principle should apply across our development cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our responsibility also includes protecting Fiji's interests when international trade policies change. Recent changes in the United States tariff policy demonstrate why the Government must remain alert. Businesses need reliable information about what has changed, which products are affected, and what options may be available. The Ministry has, therefore, been working through official channels to understand the implications for Fiji and to ensure our exporters receive accurate information rather than speculation.

The United States remains an important market for Fiji, including fisheries, agriculture, bottled water, kava, garments, timber and other value-added products. Our Mission and Trade Officials will continue to monitor developments, engage our partners and support Fijian exporters through changing market conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for our Small Island Developing States (SIDS), multilateral institution matter. They give countries, like Fiji, a voice in decisions that much larger States might otherwise dominate. Fiji also has more than 50 years of proud service in United Nations' peacekeeping.

The honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Minister for Defence, and I met the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix at Black Rock Camp in Nadi. We discussed the changing environment of UN peace operations and Fiji's future in contribution.

Our peacekeepers have served with distinction in some of the most difficult environments in the world, giving Fiji a reputation far beyond our size. This Government remains committed to international peace efforts and will continue exploring opportunities for Fiji to contribute, in accordance with our National Peacekeeping Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world around us is changing quickly. On this side of the House, we believe Fiji's answer is neither isolation nor dependence. We must remain engaged, maintain the friendships that have served us well and build new relationships where they advance Fiji's interests, and we should carry a lesson from Kuala Lumpur and Seoul.

Strategic national assets should not be judged only by what they cost in a particular financial year. The former Government understood that when it fought to preserve Fiji Airways through the darkest days of the pandemic, as I have said, they knew that they were right on that call. This side of the House believes that the same long-term thinking should apply to Fiji's strategic diplomatic presence. That does not mean keeping Missions open simply for their own sake - it means making them work. When our diplomats identify an investor, a buyer, a technology provider, a development partner, or a source of finance, there must be a pathway to bring that opportunity back to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this side of the House believes in a Fiji that is secure in its sovereignty and confident in its freedom to make its own decisions; a Fiji connected confidently to the world; a Fiji providing constructive leadership in the Pacific; and a Fiji using its international relationships to create tangible opportunities and greater prosperity for its people. That is the direction of this Government's diplomacy, and that is the work I am pleased to report to this august House.

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

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement this morning. Definitely, we do agree from this side of the House that our diplomatic footprints around the globe, and not only looking at globally, but our immediate region, is so important, and I wish to acknowledge all our diplomats who are serving the country abroad and, of course, the support staff for the great work that they are doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister spoke about the strategic decision that was carried out during the COVID-19 days. It was a difficult decision, Sir, but it had to be undertaken. Of course, the government then was fully aware of the consequences, but you have to weigh the costs and the benefits as well.

Definitely, it does not mean that our diplomatic relations were totally cut off, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Those responsibilities were given to other Missions within the area. Again, probably it will not fulfil the whole expectation of Government but then, as I had stated, these are tough decisions that have to be made because of the situation back then.

Let me look at our foreign relations and how we strategise within the global trends and the geopolitics. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji faces a complex and unstable global landscape, marked by instability and so many other issues that we are well aware of. I think the most important thing in our foreign relations is, firstly, about our relevance. We are not in a position to influence the world because of our superpower or so, but it is about being relevant. So, how do we do that? It is through our active participation at the global level with the global issues that we face, our leadership in climate change, our leadership in the ocean space, and the many other issues, and that needs to continue because that is the realms, including our peacekeeping that the honourable Minister has talked about.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us not forget the region, not only in terms of global diplomacy, but I am looking at the economic opportunities in the region as well. The honourable Minister has talked about trade, for example, and we know the imbalances that are there in terms of the imports and the export levels. That raises challenges within the Ministries that are here, particularly the primary industries. I know that years ago when government then used to convene the Heads of Missions meeting, the Ministry of Agriculture was one of the key Ministries that are usually presented to the Heads of Missions because of the opportunities that are there. I will use China, for example.

We tried to export *dalo* (taro) into China, but it lands with a 16 percent tariff. However, just a small segment of that big market will take up almost every *dalo* here in Fiji. Because trade now comes under the Minister for Foreign Affairs, that should be an opportunity. I have raised this with the previous Minister for Trade, and I will raise it again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, within the region - our neighbouring Small Island Countries depend on us. What is happening to the Tuvalu-Rotuma trade? Tuvalu has got new ships now because shipping was a key issue. We should look at that. Nauru is heavily dependent on other islands. The Cook Islands have established their Mission in Fiji because they are heavily dependent on New Zealand, but there is so much that they can get from here.

There is a lot that the honourable Minister covered, but the other thing for us as well, in terms of our foreign relations, we need to be nimble. We need to have that flexibility to adjust, and we are heavily dependent on the partnership. Sir, SDG 17 is about partnerships, and we need these partnerships to move things forward.

We enjoy the contributions from our development partners, and that is why our relations are so important. I thank the honourable Minister, and I hope that we will continue to support our Missions, and hopeful for the return in investments as well because it costs a lot to establish these Missions. We hope that the return in investment will come, and we demand this from the Heads of Missions as well.

MR. SPEAKER.— I have two more Ministerial Statements to be delivered. I have a scheduled meeting during lunch interval, so I will suggest that we take a break now. I do apologise to the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General that he has been pushed back to speak when we resumed after lunch.

Honourable Members, at this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch and Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned 12.24 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.46 p.m.

Fiji's Preparation for the 2026 Mutual Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering
and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Framework

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow Members of Parliament, I warmly greet you all this afternoon. If you can allow me to respond to the honourable Naivalurua briefly. I would like to share a story about Lomaiviti. There is a lot of negative connotations about Lomaiviti.

First of all, I would like to congratulate a son and a daughter of Lomaiviti who won gold at the recent Commonwealth, Taniela Rainibogi from Levuka, representing Fiji, and Eileen Cikamatana, representing Australia. For Eileen, this is her third gold for the Commonwealth, which speaks some secret of Levuka. I invite the honourable Minister for Sports, if there is any investment in this area, because it brings a lot of pride to this nation.

The second story, I know that we have a lot of Lomaiviti this side and somewhere around the House. We have talked about a lot of issues with negativity and being pessimistic about the future of our nation and race relations, and how *iTaukei* have failed in many areas. In Lamiti, the District of Vanuaso, *yanuyanu o Gau*, *Yasana o Lomaiviti*. On 3rd August, there was a village celebration, celebrating 10 new vehicles – three twin cabs worth \$50,000, three Pajeros, and four cars, all owned by the youths of Lamiti.

I can recall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have never had any successful story of youth involvement in terms of their farming. There are a lot of other success stories around Fiji. *Yaqona* farmers have actually come out in open to demonstrate the beauty of tilling the land. It is happening in Vanua Levu. There is a story that I used to share, a young man from Nawi, on his 21st birthday, about last year, the year before, he invited nine villages to provide the food, accommodation, and whilst he was celebrating, his new vehicle arrived. These are the stories that we should be promoting. These are the stories that we share when we go around. It is not all gloom and doom in Fiji. This side of the House is doing a lot, and this Parliament contributes to it.

I rise today to provide this honourable House with an update on Fiji's Preparations for the 2026 Mutual Evaluation of its Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Framework to reaffirm the Government's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the integrity of Fiji's financial system. Fiji's money laundering risk is high, and this is a reality. The key criminal activities that contribute to this high money laundering risk are:

- Illicit narcotics offences;
- Organised crime, tax and customs-related crimes;
- Environmental crime, particularly illegal fishing; and
- Bribery and corruption.

They have been evident through the National Risk Assessment undertaken by Fiji in 2025. Fiji has a strong legal framework to combat money laundering. These laws, such as the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997 and the Financial Transaction Reporting Act 2004 were developed and introduced over time to meet international standards.

There are also multiple institutions in place implementing these laws to address this money laundering risk and vulnerabilities. Agencies, such as the Fiji Police Force, Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption, Financial Intelligence Unit, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Reserve Bank of Fiji, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and members of the Fiji Anti-

Money Laundering Council, play a key role in this area. The private sector consisting of financial institutions and businesses such as lawyers and real estate agents are implementing measures to prevent or detect money laundering.

While we have measures in place, we acknowledge that there is always room for improvement in our anti-money laundering framework. As a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), Fiji is committed to complying with international standards on combating money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing. These international standards are referred to as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendations.

Fiji is currently undergoing assessment of its compliance with anti-money laundering standards. This assessment, known as called Mutual Evaluation, is being conducted by the APG with a team of experts drawn from other APG jurisdictions. The burden is on Fiji to demonstrate that it has complied with international standards.

It is important that Fiji does well in the Mutual Evaluation. An unfavourable finding from this assessment process may result in serious negative consequences for Fiji, including grey listing by international partners and financial institutions. The result of this Mutual Evaluation will be relied upon by a wide range of domestic and international stakeholders, like IMF, World Bank and international banks, to make various decisions such as investment, financing and trade with Fiji.

In September of this year, next month, the assessment team will be in the country to conduct in-depth discussions and interviews with representatives of the Government and private sector. This evaluation represents an important milestone for our nation. It provides Fiji with the opportunity to demonstrate the progress we have made in strengthening our national framework since our last assessment in 2015, while also helping us identify areas where further improvements may be required.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this evaluation will assess, not only strengthen our laws and regulations, but also the effectiveness with which they are implemented. The focus will be on outcomes, including how agencies work together, how financial intelligence is used, how investigations and prosecutions are undertaken, how assets linked to criminal activity are restrained and confiscated, how risks are identified and addressed across financial and non-financial sectors. The evaluation is therefore both a challenging and an opportunity.

It allows us to measure ourselves against internationally recognised standards and to continue building a system that is resilient, credible and fit for purpose. I am pleased to inform this Parliament that Fiji's preparation for this important compliance assessment is well underway. The National Anti-Money Laundering Council, which is made up of heads of key agencies - Ministry of Justice, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Fiji Police Force, the Office of the DPP, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service and Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit have been coordinating Fiji's preparation for the Mutual Evaluation.

The Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Justice, as Chair of the Council, has been providing oversight of Fiji's preparation for this mutual evaluation process. Preparation work commenced in late 2024. The Permanent Secretary has been supported in the oversight role by two senior officials from the Ministry of Justice and the Financial Intelligence Unit.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the spirit of dedication and hard work of all those officials who contributed to Fiji's efforts for the Mutual Evaluation. Over recent years, Fiji has continued to establish legislative, regulatory and institutional arrangements to address evolving financial crime risks.

Agencies have worked together to enhance information sharing, improve operational coordination, strengthen investigation capabilities, and support greater compliance across both the public and the private sectors. Equally important have been the emphasis placed on demonstrating effectiveness. This includes ensuring that the investigation results in appropriate outcomes and that our collective efforts contribute meaningfully to detecting, deterring, and disrupting illicit financial activity.

Some improvements since the last mutual evaluation include the establishment of a separate civil forfeiture unit, a dedicated pursuing assets through the civil courts by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in this current financial year. There has been a notable increase in the number of forfeiture cases, with the recent biggest case involving almost \$9 million worth of properties.

Current active cases in total wealth of around \$11 million, mostly related to drug cases. Orders for unexplained wealth under the Proceeds of Crime Act against well-known drug dealers for having accumulated wealth far beyond the legitimate declared income were also obtained by the prosecution.

Additionally, from 2023, under the National Anti-Money Laundering Council Oversight, we have enhanced our understanding of money laundering and terrorist finance risks through national risk assessment and sectoral risk assessment, such as virtual asset risk assessment and non-profit organisation risk assessment.

The Council established the Mutual Evaluation Working Group, comprising team members of the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Framework to prepare for mutual evaluation. Major legislative changes have been undertaken or are currently underway to strengthen our legal framework, such as amendments to the company's regulations to include requirements for beneficial ownership information in the Companies Act 2015.

Reform to the fisheries laws to strengthen our efforts in preventing illegal fishing, amendments to the RBF to prohibit virtual asset service providers in Fiji, review of the Police Act 1965, with the aim to strengthen investigative powers and capacity to deal with serious criminal threats, And the formation of a counter-proliferation financing working group to coordinate national efforts related to targeted financial sanctions related to Iran and North Korea.

Reforming the risk-based supervision framework of financial institutions and designated non-financial businesses and professions, which strengthens the supervision of key sectors to ensure that risks to money laundering are equitably mitigated.

Finally, increasing international collaboration with international partners, resulting in major disruptions in transnational organised crime syndicates operating within the region. The work undertaken in preparation for the mutual evaluation reflects a whole-of-government and whole-of-country approach. It recognises that no single institution can combat financial crime alone. Success depends upon strong partnership, shared responsibility, and sustained cooperation. Our efforts in this area extend beyond compliance with international obligations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a strong anti-money laundering regime contributes directly to financial integrity, economic resilience, and national security. It helps protect legitimate businesses from unfair competition. It strengthens confidence among investors and development partners, supports the cross-border banking relationships and reinforces Fiji's standing within the regional and international financial system.

It also enhances our ability to co-operate with international partners in addressing cross-

border criminal activities and emerging threats. In an increasingly interconnected world, financial crime does not respect national boundaries. Our response must, therefore, be equally coordinated, vigilant, and forward-looking.

As we approach the mutual evaluation, our focus remains on maintaining momentum, addressing any remaining gaps, ensuring that all stakeholders are fully prepared for the on-site assessment process. The success of Fiji's anti-money laundering framework requires ongoing commitment from all sectors of society, including Government institutions, law enforcement agencies, regulatory authorities, reporting entities, non-profit organisations, and the private sector. Importantly it also requires the support of Parliament.

Strong legislative foundations, adequate resources, effective foresight and sustained policy commitment are essential for maintaining an anti-money laundering regime that remains responsive to evolving risks and international exploitation. The mutual evaluations will therefore be viewed not as an end point, but as a part of a continuous journey of improvement. It is an opportunity to celebrate achievement, learn from our international best practice, and strengthen our system for the benefit of the current and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me reiterate that Fiji remains firmly committed to combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and all forms of serious financial crime. As a global partner, we are also committed to meeting international standards in this area. Our preparations for the mutual regulation are well advanced.

We approach this important assessment with commitment and a clear understanding of its significance for our nation. We ask for the continued collaboration of members of this side of the House. We invite all members to collaborate with our team on the visiting assessors for the upcoming outside visit in September.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by working together, strengthening our institutions, remaining steadfast in our commitment to international standards and effective implementation, we can continue to protect Fiji's financial system, uphold our national reputation, and contribute to a safer, more secure, and more prosperous future for all Fijians.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I do not have a story to share, but I will share the story a little later.

I thank the honourable Minister and Acting Attorney-General for the Ministerial Statement on Fiji's 2026 Mutual Evaluation, which is a very important exercise to assess the effectiveness of the systems we have in place. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Evaluation that will take place in September 2026 will actually test whether our laws, institutions, and enforcement mechanisms actually work in practise.

Now, this is an oversight by international bodies that will come to Fiji, and mutually they are going to do the assessment. However, there is another layer of assessment that has been undertaken by Parliament, and that is through our oversight and scrutiny work that we do. We had looked at the performance of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FFIU).

When we reviewed the FFIU, we realised the importance of this particular institution to safeguard the financial integrity of Fiji. Their job is to gather information, which is normally provided

by the banking services. Then they do the assessment; they do the analysis. After the analysis, they create intelligence reports, and then these reports are sent to the various enforcement agencies.

The honourable Minister has mentioned those three enforcement agencies which is FICAC, Fiji Police Force (FPF) and FRCS, but when you go deeper into the analysis of FFIU, you can automatically see where the gaps are. It is crystal clear that we do not need anyone from overseas to come and tell us, but it is good that they are coming because, at least, an international perspective will be there, and hopefully that is taken on board.

We did consultation with the enforcement agencies, and they made it very clear to us that the quality of the intelligence report needs to improve. When this intelligence report goes to the FPF, it is really not up to the mark. If it is not up to mark, what do you do with it? It still remains as a preliminary investigation. Imagine a 2024 intelligence report sent to the FPF, and we are today in 2026. It is still in preliminary stages. That means, the people who are involved have gone. What are we looking for? How long will it take?

There is a major gap in the reports generated and the action taken on the ground. Not only that, if you read the Report, it also talks about 86 percent in terms of the value of the suspicious transactions; 86 percent is tax crime. Basically, tax evasion, tax crime. However, on the other hand, you pick up the FRCS Report, and it does not make any reference to the suspicious transactions or the intelligence products sent by FFIU to them, and what did they do with it? There is no reference.

At the end of the day, the story is that we have a body that produces intelligence reports from its database, and the database is running in millions, like they have got 32 million or 37 million data stored. What is the point of having all this information when we are not able to produce quality intelligence reports? If the quality is not there, that means the people who are involved in the crime get scot-free, so we need to tighten this area.

Even the interaction with overseas financial institutions has reduced in number. Previously, there was a lot more interaction by FFIU with their counterparts. Now, no more. The Report that we looked at was just one interaction, so this is unacceptable for an institution that has been given such a mammoth task.

Again, I would like to say this, "Attorney-General, yesterday, you were told that you are slow," but I would just add one more thing. "Please, pay attention to these institutions because they are very, very crucial for Fiji." That explains why we have a lot more cases of drugs and other things, because some of these people are getting scot-free.

You did mention the success story of how the DPP managed to recover all this money through assets but here, the question is whether it was related to this suspicious transaction that was generated by FFIU, or was it purely by the Police Force on their own accord, or by people from a citizen? So that all needs to be sorted out, so that we will know exactly the performance of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit.

With those words, Mr. Speaker Sir, I just hope that the institution is further improved, and particularly their report, because previously all the annual reports used to have success stories. When you pick up the report, and you read that in that year they managed to sell the assets worth this many dollars, or they were able to successfully prosecute a case, when you read those reports, you feel good that, yes, the institution is doing all these things. Now, even those stories are gone - they are no longer in the report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

Empowering Young People - Strengthening Communities
The Navosa Youth Festival

HON. J. SAUKURU. – Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, and to everyone listening in Fiji; *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I give all praise, honour, and glory to Almighty God for His guidance, protection, and abundant blessings. Allow me to first congratulate and thank Taniela Rainibogi and Jasmine Daunakamakama for winning gold and bronze medals, respectively, in the 23rd Commonwealth Games. You have made us proud. To all the finalists in the Fiji Secondary Schools Rugby Competition, congratulations and may the best team win.

I rise to inform this August House of the successful conclusion of the week-long National Youth Development Programme held in the Highlands of Navosa on the 10th to the 14th of August 2026. The programme brought together five key initiatives – one, youth empowerment and livelihood skills training; two, the national celebration of International Youth Day; three, the Government Services Roadshow, four, Navosa Youth and Sports Festival; and the official launch of the Road to Serbia, Fiji's journey towards Export 2027, Belgrade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was far more than a week of celebration, it was a practical demonstration of what inclusive national development can achieve when Government, communities, and partners work together. The programme brought together youth empowerment, Government outreach, cultural preservation, sporting participation, and national mobilisation. This was more than another government programme.

It represented the return of a major youth, sports, cultural and community development event to the highlands after a 44-years interval. The programme recorded 1,010 attendees on the first day and 1,235 attendees on the second day. There were eight *tikina* that participated – Tikina o Namataku, Navatusila, Nadrau, Noikoro, Koroinasau, Bemana, Naqalimare and Nasikawa. These figures demonstrate why decentralising national programmes matters. Communities located far from our urban centres should not have to wait another generation to experience meaningful government engagement or access national opportunities.

Young people in highland communities often face significant geographical and financial barriers when accessing government services, training, employment, information and business support. Their circumstances may differ from those of young people in Suva, Lautoka and other urban centres, but their aspirations are fundamentally the same. They want education, employment, and opportunities to establish businesses and build sustainable livelihoods. They want safe and healthy communities. They want to participate meaningfully in national development, and they want their cultural identity to be respected and preserved. This is reflected in the 2026 International Youth Day theme – “Different Contexts, Common Aspirations.” By bringing the national celebration to Navosa, our government sent a clear message. The young people of our highlands are not on the margins of Fiji's development story. They are an essential part of it.

Empowering young women through practical skills: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we commenced at the Nassau Youth Training Centre with livelihood and economic empowerment training, with particular emphasis on young women and girls from Navosa. Practical training was provided in soap baking and tie and dye with 50 young women and girls successfully completing the programmes. These activities were not designed simply to produce certificates, but they were selected because they can provide practical pathways to household production, income generation, and micro enterprise development.

With appropriate mentoring, access to finance, product development, support in market linkages, these skills can contribute to greater economic independence, stronger household incomes, and improve community well-being. The Ministry will, therefore, follow up with the graduates and work with relevant partners to identify opportunities for advisory support, mentoring, financing, and market access. The true measure of success is not the number of certificates presented. The true measure of success is what happens after those certificates are received. It is whether these young women are able to apply their skills, generate income, and build sustainable livelihoods.

International Youth Day and Government Services Roadshow: The International Youth Day celebration was accompanied by Government Services Roadshow at Vatureba Grounds in Vatumali, Navosa. The roadshow brought together the Government Ministries, public institutions, training providers, business support agencies, and other service organisations, taking their services directly to people. For residents of highland communities, accessing government services can require lengthy and costly journeys. By bringing agencies together in one location, our young people and families were able to obtain information, explore available programmes, raise concerns, and receive appropriate referrals without travelling long distances.

The Ministry will also consolidate the final roadshow information, including services delivered, people assisted, registrations completed, and referrals requiring further action. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me emphasise one important principle – an outreach programme does not end when the booths are dismantled. Issues raised by communities must be recorded; referrals must be followed up; commitments must be monitored; access must be followed by action, and consultation must be followed by accountability.

In cultural identity and community recognition, the Navosa programme also demonstrated that youth development and cultural identity must advance together. The programme featured oratory in the distinct dialects of Navosa and traditional *meke*. These activities provided young people from across the province with an opportunity to celebrate the traditions that give their communities identity, pride and strength. Culture connects generations. It carries knowledge, values, traditions and responsibilities from our elders to our children.

It can also create opportunities in creativity, tourism, music, performance and enterprise. When young people speak their dialects, perform traditional making, learn from their elders, they are not simply looking backwards, they are carrying forward knowledge that can strengthen Fiji's future. The programme also recognises achievements in farming, entrepreneurship, livestock development, community health and crime prevention.

Such recognition is important because national development is not achieved only in government offices or urban centres. It is also achieved by young farmers, rural entrepreneurs, community leaders and ordinary citizens who work every day to improve the wellbeing of their families and communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Navosa Youth and Sports Festival featured men's and women's rugby sevens, netball and amateur boxing together with musical and social activities involving the national youth band.

Sport is far more than competition. It promotes physical and mental well-being while developing discipline, teamwork, resilience, leadership and respect. It strengthens community cohesion, supports talent identification and provides positive alternatives to drugs, crime and other harmful behaviour.

One of the most significant lasting components of the programme was the handover of gym

equipment to Navosa Central College and the Navosa Rugby Union. Prior to this assistance, neither recipient had access to this type of training equipment. The students and community athletes had enthusiasm, determination and natural talent, however, lacked some of the basic resources required for structured strength and conditioning programmes.

The handover was, therefore, not simply a delivery of equipment - it was an investment in the health, development and sporting potential of Navosa's young people. The equipment will support physical education and sporting programmes at Navosa Central College and assist the Navosa Rugby Union in strengthening player preparation and conditioning.

In the same programme, boxing was returned to the highlands of Navosa after a 44-year absence. It was last held in the province in 1982, a revival of a proud sporting tradition that has been part of Navosa's history. A community member, Mr. Jone Aravoro, said that after 44 years the sound of the bell is being heard once again, bringing excitement, courage and determination to the people of Navosa.

For our young people, it was an opportunity to step into the ring, discover their talent, build confidence and more importantly, believe that they too can pursue their dreams through sport. The Ministry handed over boxing equipment to the newly established boxing clubs.

Mr. Speaker, talent exists throughout Fiji, however, access to sporting infrastructure and development opportunities is not equally distributed. If we are serious about building a stronger sporting nation, we must address this disparity and ensure that rural athletes have a fair opportunity to develop their abilities and compete at high levels. The programme also created opportunities for women and girls to participate in rugby, netball, livelihood training and community activities.

Gender inclusion must remain at the heart of our youth and sports development agenda. The Ministry will continue working with sporting organisations, coaches, Navosa Central College and the Navosa Reunion to identify development pathways for promising athletes. The gym and boxing equipment will remain in the community. It is a tangible legacy of this programme, a practical resource that can continue to benefit young people long after the festival has ended.

Mr. Speaker, another defining moment of the week was the official launch of the Road to Serbia Expo 2027 in Belgrade. It will be held from the 15th of May to 15th of August 2027 under the theme, "Play for Humanity, Sport and Music for All." Fiji's Pavilion theme is "Bula Spirit, play, connect, thrive." This theme reflects our hospitality, creativity, sporting ability, cultural diversity, resilience and capacity to build meaningful relationships across borders.

Fiji's participation in the Expo 2027 must not be viewed simply as an overseas event. It is a national development journey and that journey begins in our communities. The road to Serbia will provide opportunities to showcase Fiji's young people, culture, sport, music, innovation, tourism, investment potential, climate resilience and entrepreneurship. It can strengthen international friendship, sports diplomacy, cultural exchange and commercial partnerships.

Launching this journey from Navosa carried a powerful message. Fiji's international representation must include the voices, talents and stories of our rural, maritime and highland communities. A young person from Navosa and, indeed, from any part of Fiji, must be able to see a place for themselves in this national journey. The Road to Serbia must, therefore, do more than represent Fiji abroad. It must connect our communities to meaningful opportunities at home.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have shared in this august House what can happen when a festival becomes a catalyst for sustained community action. However, we must also recognise the complex social

challenges cannot be resolved by one event alone. Sustainable social improvement requires the continued commitment of families, traditional and faith-based leaders, law enforcement agencies, schools, youth organisations, sporting bodies and young people themselves.

The Navosa programme forms part of an evolving Ministry model developed through previous festivals and outreach programmes in Kadavu, Bua, Cakaudrove, Naitasiri, Ba and Rotuma. This model brings government and partner services directly to young people. It listens to local priorities. It integrates skills development with culture and sport. It recognises community leadership and establishes pathways for follow-up support. They are platforms for consultation, service delivery, community mobilisation, skills development, cultural preservation and talent identification.

The experiences of different provinces and communities have demonstrated this, that although local circumstances differ, the aspirations of Fiji's young people remain remarkably connected. The success of a youth festival should not be measured only by attendance, applause or number of activities completed. It should ultimately be measured by the lasting changes it helps communities achieve.

For this reason, it will be important to monitor the impact of the Navosa Youth Festival over the coming months and years. The Navosa Programme directly supports the objectives of Fiji's National Youth Policy 2023-2027, which recognises young people as partners in national development. The different components of the programme translated the policy's priorities and practical actions. Skills training supported economic empowerment. The government services roadshow improves access to essential services. Cultural activities strengthen identity and belonging.

Sport promoted wellbeing, discipline and social cohesion. Community recognition encouraged leadership and positive contribution. The Road to Serbia connected local participation with an international opportunity. This integrated approach recognises a fundamental reality. No single Ministry, organisation or programme can address all the challenges facing young people. Effective youth development requires coordinated action by government, communities, families, civil society, development partners, businesses, sporting organisations, and most importantly, young people themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the traditional leaders and people of Navosa for welcoming this national programme into their communities. I thank the Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Administration, the *Vanua o Davutukia*, *Vanua o Nabuavatu*, *Vanua o Namataku*, *Vanua o Noikoro*, and *Vanua o Taladrau*. The Navosa Youth Council, community leaders, young women, athletes, performers, and volunteers contributed to the success of the week. I also acknowledge the government ministries, statutory bodies, training providers, development partners, civil society organisations, business support agencies, and sporting bodies that supported the programme.

Special appreciation goes to the security, health, transport, and logistical teams, and nationally then our ministry officials and all those who work behind the scenes to ensure that the programme was successfully delivered. Most importantly, I thank the young people of Navosa.

In conclusion, Sir, the message from Navosa is simple but powerful. Different communities may face different circumstances, but Fijian people share common aspirations. They want to learn, they want to work, they want to create, they want to compete, they want to preserve their identity, and they want to contribute meaningfully to their country.

Our responsibility is, therefore, not merely to speak about young people - our responsibility is to work with them, invest in them, and create the pathways through which their potential can be

realised. From the highlands of Navosa to Kadavu, from Rotuma in the province of Fiji, we are building an approach that places young people at the centre of national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we travel together on the road to Serbia, let this journey carry the voices, talents, cultures, and aspirations of all Fiji's people. Let Navosa remind us that no community is too remote to contribute, and no young person is too distant to be heard. The road to Serbia begins in our communities. It is strengthened by our unity. It is driven by opportunity, and it will succeed when every young Fijian can look to the future and say with confidence, there is a place for me in Fiji's future. Thank you.

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

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver the Opposition's response to the Ministerial Statement regarding the Navosa Youth Festival, the commemoration of the International Youth Day 2026, and the launch of the Road to Serbia Initiative. Let me be entirely clear from the outset.

The Opposition unconditionally supports and celebrates the vibrant, resilient young people of Nadroga, Navosa and Navosa province as a whole. We acknowledge their immense talent in rugby, netball, boxing, and the creative arts. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the minister paints a picture of a flawless paradise of purity at Vatureba grounds, we on this side of the House must inject a dose of harsh reality into the chamber. Festivals are fleeting, but the systemic challenges facing our youth remain strong after the tents are packed away.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister proudly highlights that 42 young people completed a tie-dye and soap-making training during the festival. We congratulate the 42 individuals but let us look at the maths. There are thousands of youth across Navosa facing chronic underemployment and lack of economic pathways. Soap-making and tie-dye are fine hobbies, but they do not constitute a robust microeconomic strategy for youth employment in rural Fiji, where there is long-term structural investment. Our rural youth need consistent market access.

They need agricultural grants to pay their loans to sustainable commercial enterprises. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they need high-speed internet connectivity and digital hubs to participate in the modern global economy. Instead of structural economic reform, the Government offers temporary festivals and localised workshops that may address the surface of our national youth employment crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister uses this platform to challenge the youth of Navosa to reject drugs, which is very commendable indeed. However, telling youth just to say no or choose sports is not a policy. It is a talking point.

We need funding for rehabilitation centres. We need increased psychological and mental health support for rural youth navigating these pressures. We need budgetary allocations to support the community councils fighting this battle at the frontline daily. Adding our gym equipment to Navosa Centre College is a gesture we welcome, but a treadmill cannot outrun the national drug crisis. We need holistic, heavily funded state intervention, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Now, let us turn to the great announcement of Road to Serbia Guide, Expo 2027. The honourable Minister spoke eloquently about taking the *bula* spirit to the global stage. While it is admirable to showcase Fiji's culture internationally, we, in the Opposition, must ask a fundamental question of priority; how much of taxpayers' money is being spent on international travel, delegation and pavilions in Belgrade, while the roads in Navosa remain neglected?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our youth cannot easily transport their farm produce or travel safely to urban centers due to poor road infrastructure. Before we build expensive roads to Serbia, let this Government first fix the roads to the remote villages of Navosa. Let us invest the capital directly into our local creative and sporting industries here at home, ensuring that the benefits reach the masses, not just a selected few who are chosen to board a flight to Europe. Youth Day should be a day of accountability, not just public relations.

We, in the Opposition, demand a shift in focus. Move from festivals to factories by establishing rural processes in economic zones. Move from slogans to solutions by funding real substance abuse rehabilitation. Move from international accession to domestic investment, prioritizing local infrastructure over foreign exposition. Let us give the youth of Navosa more than just a three-day festival, let us give them secure, predictable and prosperous future for the country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we proceed to the next item, I would like to recall the question asked by the honourable Minister. I think he did say, “why Navosa? It is almost a rhetorical question when you look at the history of Navosa, and especially when it has to do with, as we learned in school, the history of Thomas Baker. The *iTaukei* lamentation on the faith that befell Reverend Baker and his colleague that had been converted to a beautiful tune that I often hear in Radio Fiji, and it goes like, “*Oilei o Navosa, isa lei o Navosa.*” That is why I said that it is almost rhetorical in the way you asked that question. However, all credit and glory to Navosa and the Ministry of Youth and Sports in generating so much interest in the Navosa programme. Thank you, honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, I have received the following messages. The honourable Leader of the Opposition has asked to be excused due to a death in the family and in that regard, I will allow the Deputy Whip, honourable Hem Chand, to ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition's Oral Question No. 132/2026 and Written Question Nos. 175/2026 and 178/2026. By the same token, honourable Jone Usamate is also attending a traditional obligation for the family and his two Written Questions - 179/2026 and 180/2026, will also be asked by the Deputy Whip, which I have allowed.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Conversion of Nursing Stations to Health Centres (Question No. 129/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the plans to convert nursing stations to health centres?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. In terms of plans, yes, there are plans to convert nursing stations to health centers, there are plans to relocate nursing stations to new sites. And as such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health is grateful for the budgetary allocation, which we term seed funding. This will be utilised in the initial preparatory works for upgrading of nursing stations to full health centres or relocation purposes.

In terms of upgrading of nursing stations to health centres, there are certain criteria that must be met in ensuring that a nursing station can be upgraded to a health centre, and if it is upgraded, at which health centre level it is upgraded to. In terms of the grades of health centres, there are levels A, B and C, and the nursing stations, there is the old model, which is, where the workplace and the operational space are joined together, and there is a new model which is separated. For instance, for a nursing

station such as Tau Nursing Station, it used to be an old model, but we have built a new living quarters for the nurse, therefore, the whole facility is now being used as an operational area for the nursing station.

Again, it depends if the Ministry wants to elevate a nursing station to a health centre, if it is fit, based on a number of criteria, maybe population size, and conversion of a secondary school and so forth. In those instances, yes, we are guided by our AMU team of how and when these upgrades can happen. One of the main factors we also take into consideration is the geographical isolation of an area. For instance, Rotuma, which is very far, and even though it has a population reportedly less than Rabi, it is a Subdivisional Hospital. In those cases, that is taken into consideration.

Some of the examples in the Eastern Division, Soso Nursing Station in Kadavu has been upgraded to a health centre, and that is inclusive of living quarters for the nurses and the doctor, together with the area of work. Again, that has to be taken into consideration – the living quarters as well. That has to be first included as a main priority before we can definitely say it is a new health centre, but previously a nursing station.

For Central Division, we have seen Galoa Nursing Station in the Serua-Namosi Subdivision, it has been upgraded to a health centre. The Naboubuco Nursing Station in the interior of Naitasiri has been elevated to a health centre. Lomaivuna Nursing Station and the Namara Nursing Station, all are looked after by nursing practitioners, which again, comes up to a level of around a health centre service delivery.

All throughout the four Divisions, we have seen the need for new nursing stations. For example, in the area around Saqani, we feel that there should be another nursing station to cover between the health centre and Lakeba, because in between the Saqani area, there is no other area of service. There is a plan for Sese in Saqani. In terms of relocation of nursing stations to new sites, we have Tokaimalo Nursing Station, which is budgeted for, and there is Nausori Highlands Nursing Station, which sits in a site within the village. It used to be a self-help initiative by the village, but now they have given it and on the opposite side of the village, and that is up for preparatory works.

As I have mentioned, the upgrading of a nursing station to a health centre level dependent on the grade, it also must be upgraded with the capacity of storage, because expansion of drugs that will be accommodated into their facilities will be upgraded also in terms of the living quarters, as I have mentioned. It is a big work to upgrade a facility to a degree and a level of service delivery and that is something that requires proper planning.

Of course, when we came in, we have seen that most of the facilities, they have been upgraded from nursing stations to health centres. They were just in name. There was no accommodating living quarters for the doctors and the nurses. They are still operated by the nursing practitioner, and that is something we are playing catch-up with in ensuring that while we upgrade, that all aspects of the upgrade have to be met to ensure that an area where we send staff to is workable and also liveable.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I thank the Minister for the comprehensive answer with regards to the upgrade. As rightfully said, it is a name change from nursing station to health centres however, most of the health centres at the moment, they do not have the waiting area. The other supplementary question is can the Minister elaborate as to what's being done? As we actually upgrade from nursing station to health centre, the number grows, however we actually have seen that waiting area is an issue whichever health centre you visit. Is there any intention to have a separate project just to improve the waiting area for the patients?

HON. RATU. DR. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, that is something is being considered by the

Ministry. As you can see in our budgetary allocation, there are minor works and in the last financial year, most of the divisions have utilised that to construct waiting areas within facilities so there should be waiting areas and for the ones that have been upgraded, yes, waiting areas provisions have been included in the expense.

Review of Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services
(Question No. 131/2026)

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

Can the Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament whether the Ministry is undertaking a review or restructuring the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services to improve its management and operational performance?

HON. RATU. DR. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, I just realised that question time is more on question on health and education. I think it is our question time today for health and education. Nevertheless, maybe because we are given more money.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has initiated extensive structural and operational reforms at the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services to address persistent supply chain issues and overall improve overall efficiency. While Government receives an adequate allocation for medical supplies, including \$82.4 million, specifically for pharmaceutical and biomedical supplies and management distributions, approximately \$72 million budgeted explicitly for the purchase of medical supplies and equipment. This has led to the execution of the replacement plan, such as the purchase and installation of 18 new four-mount X-ray units, 16 dental chairs, haematology machines, to name a few.

To systemically address these operational challenges, the Ministry's strategic intervention includes supply chain digital reforms and digital inventory integration. The Ministry has fully transitioned from paper-based tracking to the M-Supply online logistic system with approximately 9,086 stock-keeping units in the inventory, with an average stock holding of \$48.6 million in 2027 in comparison to \$47.6 million in 2025-2026 and \$46.08 million in 2024-2025.

Healthcare staff at rural health centres now utilise digital tablets to request medical, dental, laboratory, and radiological supplies in real time, direct, door-to-door delivery. This distribution model has changed to bypass unnecessary logistic bottlenecks with the setup of warehouse TOLU in the Northern Division, which serves all health facilities in the North. The next phase is to expand with the warehouse at the West to allow for better prepositioning of supplies.

Projected operational savings partnering with regional logistics beyond essential systems backed by Australian Government cooperation. The reform has minimised the tendering process timeline from five months to within one to two months with their existing 34 tenders, which consist of medicines, medical consumables, dressings, clothing, infection control, appliances, bed linen, X-ray and laboratory equipment.

In terms of policy and legislative updates, regulatory reviews, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is actively conducting legislative overhaul to key governing frameworks, specifically targeting the Medicinal Product Act of 2011 and the Pharmacy Profession Act of 2011 to optimise top levels and standards. That is ongoing.

The international pharmacopoeia integration (Fiji signed a new pharmacopoeia agreement with India) allows Government to buy basic medicine at affordable prices to ensure timely

availability across all subdivisions and associations. Localised testing infrastructure in addition to administrative restructuring. Testing facility currently being developed in phases from this financial year with a small unit. This eliminates the need to send medical products to Australia for testing and establishes Fiji as a self-sufficient South Pacific Medicine Hub.

The latter is very important in terms of the development of Fiji pharmaceutical and medical supplies, particularly the local testing infrastructure. That is the next phase in the development of the site. I mentioned earlier, to allow our technical people to test medicine on-site in FPBS so they do not have to refer overseas. It can also serve as a hub for the region, enabling specimen to be sent to Fiji for testing. This is something we are planning for, as part of future development. Those are some of the reports that have been made based on the question asked.

HON. A.A MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again I thank the honourable Minister for his comprehensive answer. In terms of infrastructure, before that, I would like to thank the Director and his team for what they are trying to do with the limited resources and space they have. Mostly we hear in the news that people are asking questions and reflecting badly on how FPBS is performing, but we do understand that with the limited resources they are doing the utmost they can.

In terms of infrastructure, especially at Vatuwaqa, honourable Minister, though another warehouse has been built, it is still not sufficient. We have seen many 40-foot and 20-foot containers sitting in their parking yard, trying to allocate storage space. Are there any plans to develop another bigger warehouse for FPBS? The way things are stacked in the warehouse at the moment, that is also one of the reasons it is difficult to identify where the products are before they are supplied to hospitals and health centres. What are the plans for new infrastructure.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for that supplementary question.

Yes, if you go to the back of FPBS, there is ample space for expansion. That is something I had mentioned in terms of the testing capabilities and the expansion of storage. As it is, even with warehouse Rua, it is full.

On my visit to FPBS, I learnt that the site was given by the former Prime Minister to the then Pharmaceutical Board at the time. We are grateful for that, and we did a survey and found that there is still ample space at the back for expansion to happen. We plan to utilise that, as you have rightly said, to build spaces for extra storage for our essential medicines and equipment and supplies.

Progress on Reducing new HIV Infection
(Question No. 133/2026)

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

Given the increasing number of HIV cases in Fiji, can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament what progress the Ministry has made towards achieving its target for reducing new HIV infections?

HON. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you honourable Chand for the question. Let me be direct with this House that Fiji is now in a generalised HIV epidemic. 2026 UNAIDS estimates indicate that about 9,100 people were living with HIV in 2025 and, possibly, as many as 12,000, up from fewer than 700 in 2010.

Adults from 15 to 49 years prevalence has reached 1.6 percent, crossing the threshold that

defines a generalised epidemic. The infections are still rising, an estimated 1,700 in 2025, roughly three times the level in 2018. I will not stand before this House and claim that we have already turned the curve downward.

The honest position is that we have not yet reached the turning point. But I can assure the House that for the first time, the Ministry has a place, a coordinated response required to bend it. Beneath the headline figures, there is real measurable progress in the very areas that determine whether new infections eventually fall.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our first task is to find people living with HIV, because a person who knows their status can be protected and can protect others. Here the progress is clear. The number of people who know their status has risen from around 785 in 2022 to some 3,551 in 2025.

The number of people on treatment has grown from about 506 in 2020 to just over 2,000 in 2025. In here, viral suppression is key. The goal of treatment is to suppress the virus to undetectable levels and the person who is virally suppressed cannot pass HIV. Let me repeat that. A person who is virally suppressed cannot pass HIV.

Treatment is therefore also prevention. For every person we start on treatment, keep in care, and support to reach viral suppression reduces future infections. I should be candid with the House that we cannot yet measure viral suppression reliably across the country from our current data.

Strengthening viral load testing and the systems behind it is itself part of the response plan. So that we can hold ourselves accountable to this most important measure. Our own data has told us where the system is failing, and this Government is acting on it.

As testing has expanded, the share of diagnosed people who are actually started on treatment has fallen over 98 percent with 22 new ones to about 56 percent in 2025. In short, we are now finding people faster than we were linking and keeping them in care. Closing that gap through same-day treatment start and active support to keep people in care is the single most powerful action available to us. And it is at the centre of the National HIV Outbreak Response Plan, which this government has established and funded alongside expanded testing and community-led outreach. We also protect the mothers and infants, as women now account for around 42 percent of new infections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, self-prevention is where we can stop infections before they begin. But we must be honest about what is driving them. The ministry recognises a significant role in high-risk drug use, in particular sharing of needles and syringes, displaying a rapid rise of new HIV infection in Fiji. The global evidence is clear. The harm reduction programme, including a Needle Syringe Programme, is urgently needed to interrupt this route of transmission.

The Ministry, together with our partners in the law and justice sector, is working to draft regulations that would support a safe and lawful introduction of harm reduction. Once those regulations are in place, we intend to scale up harm reduction programmes as a priority.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, prevention is where we can stop infections before they begin. And here I want to highlight one of the most promising tools now available to us. Fiji has moved quickly to introduce PrEP, which is short for pre-exposure prophylaxis, a medicine that a person who is HIV negative can take to protect themselves from acquiring the virus.

We are among the early movers in our region to make it available. But I will be honest with the House, uptake so far has been slower than we needed it to be. Because too few of those at risk yet know the protection exists or how to obtain it.

That is why the Ministry is now seeking funding to market PrEP and scale up its use extensively across the country. I am also pleased to inform the House that Fiji is preferentially accessing Lenacapavir, a breakthrough form of PrEP that requires only two injections a year to provide protection from HIV, with the first supplies expected to arrive at the end of this year. This has been possible thanks to DFAT and our partners at Global Fund.

A medicine that protects a person for six months at a time has the potential to transform prevention in Fiji, particularly for those who find daily tablets difficult to sustain. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to be candid with this House on one further point, Fiji's political commitment to this response has been strong, and this Government has backed it with a fund multi-year plan.

However, translating that commitment into a measurable fall in new infections will take time. These interventions must be scaled across all four divisions, and that depends on strengthening a health workforce that remains stretched beyond the enabling measures, some requiring the support of this House, and allow the response to reach everyone in need.

For these reasons, a sustained reduction in new infections is a medium-term outcome. The measures of progress I can honestly report to the House today are the sub-price in people being tested, diagnosed and the growth in people on treatment, our early introduction of PrEP and Lenacapavir, and a clear funding plan to close gaps that the data has exposed. The Ministry is doing the necessary work now so that Fiji reaches the turning point as early as possible, and I ask the continued support of this House in that effort.

HON. P. D. KUMAR. -Thank you, Sir. My question is related to the perception that is attached to the free syringe programme. There is this view that we are promoting the use of drugs rather than preventing the spread of HIV. So, in that area, Minister, how would you, or what will you, do to change this perception? And we were also told during the HIV workshop we had at the Parliament that the syringes are sitting in the warehouse, but they are not able to put it out in public places.

HON. DR. RATU. A. R. LALABALAVU. - Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a very good question, and it is one of the challenges that we are facing in the introduction of the programme. For starters, we have to have the buy-in of the Ministry of Justice, Police and so forth. So just from the operational aspects point of view, we have taken special team made up of various part of ministries and organisations to look at how the needle exchange programme is done in Australia. It was an eye-opener for the police that we took over and so forth. If we change their perspective on what the programme is about as we are mindful of the fact that, yes, there are ongoing concerns that we are promoting drug use, but that is not the case.

That is for the technical part. Then we have to go out into the community to have a buy-in of the community. That is why, through the task force, we are continuously talking with the faith-based organisations, the *vanua*, and other relevant organisations out there, who continue to push back on the reintroduction of the programme. It is one of the easiest ways we can reduce transmission. That is the basic underlying factor. However, we have the buy-in of the community, and we continuously raise the issue with them. We already have the support of the relevant stakeholders on the operational side, and some even to the extent of the community.

We will continue to try and reach out to those who are constantly pushing back on the idea of this programme being implemented. That is the usual case, if any new programme comes in that has a perception that it is causing more trouble than good. More work for us to do in terms of getting that to the community. That is why the Ministry is partnering with the *vanua*, faith-based organisations, and other organisations out there to ensure that we pass this message on, and that we are trying to do something good here with introducing this programme.

Medical and Dental Practitioner Act 2010
(Question No. 137/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament whether the Government intends to review the Medical and Dental Practitioner Act 2010, to ensure that the governance arrangements of the Fiji Medical Council and the Fiji Dental Council reflect current professional and regulatory requirements?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the simple answer that is based on the question by the honourable Maharaj is we are reviewing the Act, and there is a dedicated task force actively addressing the following areas on the legislative overhaul, such as expanding council representation, addressing practitioner grievances, formalising modern professional scopes, and strengthening regulatory enforcement.

As I have said, the taskforce is there, and we are currently doing the internal reviews. Once that is available and put into a form of a Cabinet submission, then we will do that, bring it to Cabinet, and we will follow the normal process before we bring it to the House. In short, yes, the Ministry not only intends to review, but is currently reviewing the legislation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the honourable Minister can further elaborate, if the internship programme is going to be part of this review, especially with regard to the internship, if the timeframe can be given?

Currently, what we are seeing is the students, they finish their education in December, they have to wait until April for the graduation to take place, then another three to four months for employment, and by the time their internship starts, it is almost a year. Young graduates are losing a year, whereas they can be registered within that particular year. If the internship programme and the frequency of the exams – because what we have seen is if there are three phases, for example, Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), *Viva Voce*, and a written exam, even though students have passed the written exam, just to re-sit for the OSCE, they have to wait for six months to one year. Accumulatively, now what the medical professionals are facing, instead of having a one-year internship, they are able to finish the internship in two years to three years' time. Is that going to be part of the review itself?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes. That is something that can be improved.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Minister for Health appears to be on a winning streak today. He is doing very well, and we all agree. A great job addressing the preferred questions under his portfolio, so I see no reason to interrupt the momentum. There is one question that is also addressed to him, which I will bring back so that it can be addressed all at once. For that reason, I will now call on honourable Virendra Lal to ask Question No. 173/2026.

Update on Renovation of Valelevu Health Centre
(Question No. 173/2026)

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

Valelevu is a highly populated area, and the Valelevu Health Centre was identified as requiring renovation. It was previously announced that renovation work would be

carried out, however, no visible progress has been made so far. Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the current status and progress of the renovation?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the refurbishment and upgrade of the Valelevu Health Centre have been integrated into a comprehensive, long-term framework under the Pacific Healthy Islands Transformation Project (PHITP). The current status, planned milestones and strategic changes regarding the facility, addressing the underlying timeline and infrastructure changes include:

(1) Project Alignment and Scope Under the FRIP Project

The upgrade is aligned with a newly approved six-year health transformation initiative, and the strategy addresses long-term capacity rather than delivering temporary quick fixes. There is overcrowding and capacity constraints within the facility, and the Ministry acknowledges that the current centre is severely congested and lacks appropriate space.

However, the Ministry is shifting towards a major structural refurbishment combined with a completely new building to sustain the high-density service demands. Service continuity planning is very important since the site handles high patient volumes daily. The Ministry is actively scoping alternative options for clinical service delivery during these disruptive construction phases.

(2) Expected Upgrades and Digital Delivery

The upcoming project layout encompasses holistic facility modernisation, a climate resilience and WASH infrastructure improvement, including building climate-resilient clinical rooms and modernised water and sanitation and hygiene services. The facility will introduce integrated electronic medical records and teleconsultation channels to alleviate physical congestion.

(3) Clinical Gatekeeping

Enhanced local care networks will be established to keep localised conditions directly and reduce non-essential referrals to major tertiary hospitals.

So, in a nutshell, honourable Member, while the announcement has been made on the Valelevu upgrade, it has been incorporated into the Financing Resilient Infrastructure Project (FRIP) and, therefore, it is not something small that will be done about the facility; it is a major renovation overhaul of the Valelevu. It will take time; however, while it happens, we will continue to look for alternative sites, since Valelevu Health Centre has to be emptied so that this operation can happen, while the alternative site will be the new temporary new site for service delivery.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable members, I have a request from honourable Bulitavu, if he could jump over the others for some questions, as he has an engagement to attend to.

Emergency Evacuation and Cyclone Shelter - Lau Group
(Question No. 172/2026)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, and National Disaster Risk Management inform Parliament on the Ministry's emergency evacuation and cyclone shelter upgrades for the Lau Group?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to move the question that was directed to me to be asked early. I thank the honourable Assistant Minister for Transport for asking this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Lau is remote, but remoteness must never become a reason for unequal protection. It makes preparedness more important, not less. The Lau Group faces significant risk from tropical cyclones, storm surges, coastal flooding, strong winds, and other climate hazards. For our communities in Lau, geographical isolation can severely constrain the movement of emergency supplies, assistance, and response services during periods of extreme weather. That is why Lau, preparedness is not a luxury; it is a necessity, and our approach is simple. We manage disaster before the strike, not after.

That is why the Coalition Government, through the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, is translating national policy into practical protection, by investing in community resilience, disaster preparedness, and safe, functional, and resilient evacuation centres across our maritime communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not simply constructing buildings; we are protecting lives, preserving development gains, and building the confidence of maritime communities that their Government sees them, hears them, and will stand with them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the, 2024, 2025, and 2025-2026 financial years, Government supported 14 Evacuation Centres Projects across the Lau group, representing a combined investment of approximately \$661,230. These investments have reached communities across Nayau, Lakeba, Moala, Vatoa, Oneata, Matuku, Ono-i-Lau and Fulaga.

In 2024 and 2025, the Government supported 10 Evacuation Centre Projects, with a combined value of approximately \$290,470. This included the evacuation centre, hall retrofitting, and renovation works at Salia and Narocivo in Nayau, Nakaukilagi, Tubou, Talahele, and Yadrana in Lakeba, Keteira in Moala, Vatoa, and Waiqori in Oneata. The majority of these projects were funded through my Ministry, with the Vatoa projects supported through the Office of the Prime Minister.

In the 2025-2026 Financial year, Government continued this investment with four further projects valued at approximately \$370,743. This included the Makadru Evacuation Centre in Matuku, Levuka-i-Daku Evacuation Centre in Matuku, Lovoni Evacuation Centre in Ono-i-Lau, and the Muanaira Evacuation Centre in Fulaga. The Makadru and the Levuka-i-Daku Projects were funded by my Ministry. The Lovoni Project was jointly funded by the Office of the Prime Minister, while the Muanaira Project was funded through the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these investments demonstrate the Government's clear commitment to direct public resources to communities in some of Fiji's most remote maritime areas. This development- justice in action- risk and need, not distance from Suva, must guide investment. Remoteness must not mean being forgotten. No maritime community should be left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those important projects are not stand-alone works. They are practical delivery of the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050, founded on empowering the people of Fiji through unity. They advance NDP pillars of economic resilience, people empowerment and good governance by protecting lives, safeguarding public assets and livelihoods, improving the resilience of rural and outer island infrastructure and demonstrating coordinated and accountable use of public resources.

We also directly advance Fiji's National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy by moving Government investment from reactive recovery towards prevention, preparedness, and risk-informed development. Retrofitting and strengthening evacuation facilities reduces exposure, protects development gains, and gives communities the capacity to act before hazards become disasters.

The investments support the National Humanitarian Policy by strengthening safe, accessible, and dignified shelter, locally-led preparedness, coordinated humanitarian action, and protection of people most at risk, reducing women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

In a maritime emergency, preparedness and pre-positioned community capacity are essential to timely, principled, and effective assistance. They are equally aligned to our draft National Rural Development Policy (NRDP), which places people and their place at the centre of development. The NRDP calls for an integrated, risk-informed, and community-led rural development, stronger provincial and divisional coordination, and equitable access to essential infrastructure and services.

In Lau, these evacuation centres are there for both disaster assets and anchors of resilient local development. Taken together, this framework gives Government one clear direction. Development must reduce risk, empower communities, and reach every part of Fiji.

Our investment in Lau shows that this Government is matching national ambition with action on the ground. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our approach is not to build and forget - it is to build, prepare, and protect. And the evacuation centre is not simply a building. It is a critical community infrastructure, a place of safety, and a lifeline when normal systems are disrupted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our investment decisions are guided by risk, capacity, functionality, and equity. We ask, what risk does the community face? How many people may need shelter? Is the facility accessible to women, children, older persons, and persons with disability? And when disaster strikes, it will remain safe and operational. This is particularly important for Lau, when a cyclone hits the remote island, help cannot always arrive immediately. So, our evacuation centres must be more than buildings. They must be safe places that communities can rely on when the need is the most.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our first line of protection is a prepared and empowered community. Safe infrastructure, early warning, local plans, drills, trained leadership, and clear responsibilities must work together. This is how we protect lives and reduce pressure on the national response system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government's commitment goes beyond building evacuation centres. A building alone does not make a community resilient. A resilient community is one that understands the risk and knows where to go, knows how to get to safety, and knows what to do when disaster strikes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government will continue to strengthen community preparedness, resilient infrastructure, disaster risk reduction, and coordinated humanitarian response. We will work across Government and with communities and partners to convert policy commitments into visible, measurable protection for our people.

Our objective is clear – safe, stronger, and resilient communities, communities that are prepared, protected, empowered, and communities that share fairly in national development regardless of geography.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me leave Parliament with this message. I quote:

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me leave Parliament with this message, and I quote:

“...we do not wait for disaster to teach us the value of preparedness. We prepare before disaster strikes because when disaster strikes, preparedness saves lives. That is our commitment to Lau and the maritime Fiji, a development that treats every island, protects the vulnerable, and leaves no community behind.”

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister. Let us see any supplementary.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honourable Minister for his comprehensive explanation and answer. A mind-blowing honourable Minister. It sounds all rosy-rosy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I hope my people in Votua, after listening to your statement, will be happy. My question to you, honourable Minister, can you provide the timeline? You only have four months - your term will finish in four months. It is good that you wake up now. Very nice. You woke up but you have only four months left. Can you provide the timeline?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU. - Just one example the Vatoa Evacuation Centre will be commissioned in October. So that is one month. For the timeline, if the Honourable Member was listening properly, I was mentioning the financial years 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027. Those are the projects that are currently being done. Some of them are done and in the next fortnight, the week after next, I will be travelling to Lau to commission a few and a few are also ongoing, progress and ongoing construction works, plus others that will be prioritised in this financial year that will be looked at by the project offices before they buy the materials.

Also, the challenges that we have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we deliver these materials to Lau it depends on the weather and also how we are going to offload. We are also looking into investing in some landing craft so we can help shift these building materials. Not only the one-third, two-thirds rural housing scheme, but also materials for evacuation centres. So, the timelines and the plans are already there. I cannot give a specific timeline, but it will be on time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- That will do. No more questions, please. I must say I have to apologise because I did not realise your question was about Lau, and without intention, I did not promote it because of that, and the fact that Kabara was not included in your list, so I am quite happy.

Honourable Members, I think it would be an appropriate time to take our break but before we do that, we will entertain a suspension motion.

For our purpose of the Standing Orders, I will now call upon the Government Whip, to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. - Mr. Speaker, 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 on today's Order Paper.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. - Thank you, Mr. Speaker, we have a few oral questions and a

few written questions and also three Bills for tabling this afternoon.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate, if any. I do not see any. I will call on the Government Whip to speak, if she wishes.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. – I have no further comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for a break.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.24 p.m.

QUESTIONS

The Parliament resumed at 5.02 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have received a request from the honourable Minister for Education, he has to travel to Nadi this evening, and if we can rearrange the questions so that his questions are all together and he can answer them in a cluster. We are asking for honourable Nalumisa's forgiveness, if the honourable Minister for Education can get his request, we will allow that to happen.

Repair and Maintenance Assistance to Remote Schools (Question No. 165/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament how the Ministry assists remote schools that are unable to carry out repairs and maintenance, infrastructure works and general operations due to increasing costs and inadequate Free Education Grant?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to clarify and correct the honourable Member in terms of his question relating to inadequate Free Education Grant. There is no support to your statement in terms of the inadequate Free Education Grant. That Free Education Grant is one form of support to rural schools in terms of repairs and maintenance.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason why I have used that word "inadequate" because the Free Education Grant was introduced in 2014, and there was a formula. The formula was revised in 2020, and in 2023, VAT and corporate tax have increased, which is why I am saying that it is inadequate.

My supplementary question is that the cost of things has increased in the last few years due to increase in VAT and corporate tax and grants to schools have not increased. With no increase in grant, is putting a lot of pressure on schools, parents and students. Parents are forced to do fundraising and there is levy imposed on parents and students. My question, are there plans to revise the grant formula to assist, especially those schools that are in rural remote areas?

MR. SPEAKER.- You do not need to elaborate, the question has been asked.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, yesterday I requested the honourable Member to be specific in terms of the question, and I requested a list of schools from him yesterday. Likewise, today, he is also generalising his statement.

The Free Education Grant has not reduced or decreased. According to the records from 2022, for Ba and Tavua, we paid out \$5 million annually from 2022 to 2026. The same amount has been earmarked. Likewise, for Cakaudrove, for Eastern schools, for Lautoka, Yasawa, Ba, Macuata, Bua, Nadroga, Navosa, Nausori and Ra districts. Altogether, there is no decrease in terms of the Free Education Grant.

Of course, you have raised some, maybe not genuine questions in terms of the issues that you have highlighted. But as a former Ministry of Education official, an executive position at that, you would know pretty well that assistance are given through the Free Education Grant. It also allows the school management in respective schools to ask for assistance from other Ministries and

Departments, of course, the *sol*i and fundraising.

In terms of the review of the Free Education Grant, that is something that we intend to do because of the more amount that has been given to some schools due to the number of students enrolled in the school. So, higher number of students, high grant and lesser number of students, less grant. This is something that we have taken into consideration to ensure that the allocation is also inclusive, equitable to those schools that are in the remote and maritime areas.

Addressing School Dropouts
(Question No. 167/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on how the Ministry is addressing the issue of school dropouts?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, another general question from the honourable Member, if he could just clarify the meaning of school dropouts. What are you referring to?

MR. SPEAKER.- We will ask honourable Nath to clarify.

HON. V NATH.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Minister knows very well what I am asking. In today's paper you will find he has given a statement that in primary school he has noted. Sir, allow me to read. He said in the article today that students miss out Year 8 exams. There were 19,000 students and registered students to sit the exam was 18,628. It is a coincidence that this question is being asked today as this is also in the media. Generally, everyone must have noticed that we have a lot of students roaming our towns and cities which is a concern.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I could not get the definition of his school dropouts, because it is very important that the honourable Members of this House know the definition of school dropouts. He could have consulted the honourable Member in front of him to probably give a proper definition.

I will just give a proper definition according to UNESCO. Sir, UNESCO definition is school dropout is a learner who disengages and leaves an education or training programme prematurely before completing a cycle or course, and without achieving the relevant learning or training objective. So, if you are referring to Year 8, as what I mentioned, put a specific stated date and I could have given an answer.

MR. SPEAKER.- Is that the question you were asking?

HON. V. NATH,- No, Sir. He is indirectly challenging the Business Committee's decision to put this question. That is my personal feeling. But this is a concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have alluded earlier, we have seen a number of young students who should be in schools who are on the streets.

MR. SPEAKER.- One moment. Let me just clarify, he says there are levels of dropouts. I think that is what you are saying. At Year 8, or further up the chain?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is from Year 1 to Year 13.

MR. SPEAKER.- Year 1 to Year 13?

HON. V. NATH.- Sir, free education definition is, every child has a right for free education from Year 1 to Year 13. So, anyone who does not reach Year 12 or Year 13, I believe is a dropout.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think the honourable Minister can answer that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Probably he is referring to primary and secondary schools, where there are classes and levels in respective primary and secondary schools, even taken in ECE, which he forgot. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this financial assistance on the strategy that we are trying to put in place, the Free Education Grant, Transport Assistance, \$200 Back-to-School Assistance, and for this 2026 school year, the Back-to-School Assistance of \$41.8 million has been paid out to 208,764 students. The 2026-2027 Budget also provides \$54 million for blue and yellow student cards and continues with the Free Education Grant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the new Education Bill, 2026, that is all part of the strategy to improve the concerns that have been raised. The new Education Bill introduces a comprehensive legal framework, covering early childhood education, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education and higher education. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education has implemented the Student Progression and Retention Policy, which provides a clear framework for assessing student progress, ensuring that decisions about a student's advancement or repetition are made collaboratively between parents, students, teachers, and the heads of schools.

The Ministry has also introduced internal assessments as part of the criteria for student performance, whereby classroom-based assessments and examination marks are both considered. The Ministry has also established new secondary schools and infant schools to address the logistical problems that a student faces.

We have also conducted ministerial visitations across the schools around Fiji and held discussions with students, teachers, and the *vanua* on the importance of education and completing schooling. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the National Government Policy, reviewing the retirement age, teachers continue teaching in our schools to address teacher shortages, as well as to have experts in education.

The Literacy, Numeracy, Curriculum, Relevance, Strengthening, Vocational Opportunities and the Matua Programme – these measures are important because persistent learning difficulty, disengagement, economic pressure and lack of suitable pathways can contribute to students leaving school early. At school level, I hope the honourable Member is listening, attendance and student welfare concerns are monitored, and schools are expected to engage parents and guardians and refer cases requiring additional support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the heart of quality education is a qualified, motivated and well-supported teaching workforce. The Ministry is continuously working on increasing the quality of qualified teachers through training, professional development and international collaboration to enhance teaching pedagogies. Also, the Ministry through the tertiary institutions works with international cooperation and support from our development partners to ensure strengthening of teacher qualification and delivery of learning outcomes through expansion of teacher qualifications and training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a recent data on teacher qualification reflects a highly specialised and credentialed workforce with over 14,000 of our teachers holding Bachelor of Education; over 3,000 holding Postgraduate Diploma; and over 1,200 with Masters' Degree. This ensures that every learner is supported by a teacher who is not only qualified but also continuously advancing their professional expertise.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will have only one more question. You decide which one of you is going to ask the question.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year, I had one Written Question and according to the figures that I received, the school dropout has increased. I am talking about students before they complete Year 8, the number of students who dropout, that figure has gone up in the last three years. My question to the honourable Minister is, has the Ministry done any research? What are the main reasons why students drop out before completing Year 8t education?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to our records, the school dropout for Primary School last year was less than previous years, 740, as compared to 1,200 in 2024. In Secondary School, 400 as compared to 869. So just to correct your...

MR. SPEAKER.- The reason why it has decreased?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The reasons I have already mentioned.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir,...

MR. SPEAKER.- I have already closed the discussion on that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No. This has to do with honourable Rinesh Sharma. He has rushed across to CWM Hospital. He had a question addressed to the honourable Minister for Education.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will allow the question to be asked by

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Hem Chand can ask.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, sure.

HIV Strand in School Curriculum
(Question No. 168/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament whether HIV is embedded as a strand in a subject within the school curriculum in Fiji?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for raising this important question. The HIV-related content is explicitly taught in seven curriculum areas. In Year 7, healthy living under the strand - growth, development, and a sub-strand - family health. Students are taught the causes of HIV and AIDS, methods of prevention, and the importance of making healthy and responsible lifestyle choices.

The curriculum also promotes abstinence, responsible relationship, and awareness of risk factors associated with HIV transmission. Sir, HIV awareness is further incorporated in Year 7 Basic Science under the strand - living things and the environment, and the sub-strand structure and life processes, where students learn about diseases, including sexually transmitted infections, and the impact on human health.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the Secondary School level, Year 11 Biology addresses HIV through the strand structure and life processes and the sub-strand structure and functions in animals. Students

investigate disorders and diseases relating to the reproductive system, including sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. This enables learners to understand the biological impact of HIV and its relationship to reproductive health.

Sir, HIV education is further strengthened in Year 13 Biology under Strand 3, biodiversity, change, and sustainability, specifically within the sub-strand viruses. Through this topic, Mr. Speaker, Sir, students learn about the structure and characteristics of viruses and gain a deeper understanding of HIV as a retrovirus.

Students are introduced to the unique nature of retroviruses and how their ability to integrate genetic material into host cells presents significant challenges for the development of a premature cure. This scientific knowledge enhances students understanding of the complexity of HIV and the importance of prevention and public health awareness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, HIV education is further strengthened in Year 12 and Year 13 through Family Life Education under the strand - family health. Students examine Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STIs) in Fiji, and the current overview of the HIV epidemic in Fiji. Students are also exposed to information on HIV, alongside other infections such as Hepatitis B, Syphilis, Gonorrhea, and Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Sir, awareness is also integrated into the English and other language curriculum through reading, writing, comprehension, and research-based learning activities.

Sir, HIV-related themes are incorporated within textbook units, expository essay writing, summary writing, comprehension passages, and research projects. At the Secondary level, Mr. Speaker, Sir, English curriculum units covering topics such as provident living, society, understanding youth culture, gender equality, human rights, and quality education provides opportunities for HIV awareness and discussion. Research themes relating to youth behavior, communication, and learning also accommodate HIV-related concepts and contemporary health issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's approach ensures that students encounter HIV education progressively throughout their schooling years, beginning with basic health awareness and prevention. Students subsequently develop a deeper scientific understanding of disease transmission, reproductive health, viruses, and broader social issues associated with HIV.

Through these curriculum provisions, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry aims to equip students with accurate and evidence-based information, encourage responsible decision-making, promote healthy lifestyles, reduce stigma and discrimination, and support national efforts to address HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education remains committed to ensuring that health education within schools is relevant, evidence-based, and responsive to emerging public health concerns affecting children and young people of Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will revisit honourable Koya's point. You said it was a point of clarification? Elaborate on how that links with the question that should be asked.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, we received a message from honourable Rinesh Sharma that he had rushed across to CWM Hospital. We are just asking whether his question can be asked by

MR. SPEAKER.- That is different; it is not a point of clarification. It is not provided for under the Standing Orders. Such a matter has to be done through a request to the Chair to determine whether the question can be asked, as was done by the honourable Leader of the Opposition and, similarly, by honourable Usamate.

Now, you are asking verbally for the question that was to be asked by honourable Sharma to now be asked by honourable Hem Chand. I will accept, honourable Koya. I will now then ask honourable Hem Chand to ask Question No. 169/2026.

Incidents of Preaching in Schools
(Question No. 169/2026)

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

Recently there was a case at a Lautoka school where a preacher addressed students and singled out a Muslim student in front of his peers, which was insulting. Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament what measures has the Ministry put in place to ensure that incidents of this nature do not happen in the future?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member understands that this is an operational matter that is dealt with in-house. The confidentiality of the teacher and information is something that we would like to request the honourable Member to understand.

However, if you insist, the process of Performance & Discipline Unit has been undertaken on the teacher involved, because of some areas of oversight in terms of the proper approval and endorsement that needed to be undertaken by the respective officials and teachers from the Permanent Secretary. This case, as I have mentioned, the exercise has already been done in terms of the Performance & Discipline Unit, and they have made the necessary recommendation regarding the teacher, and that is where we are up to right now.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyone will understand, this is actually quite a disturbing thing. Honourable Minister, from what I understand, allegedly the words were in such a tone, and the actual words would probably be tantamount to a criminal offence under the Public Order Act, and also the....

MR. SPEAKER.- I will stop you there, honourable Koya. This matter is confidential. At the moment it is being handled through the process of the school administration. So, unless and until they decide, they might even decide the matter will be referred to the police. So please, I do not think we can go through to that and ask the details of what is being done. It is totally outside the requirement of Standing Order 44(12) and I quote: "A question may not seek information about a matter that, in my opinion (as the Speaker), is confidential." In my opinion, it is confidential for the time being.

On the 11th Oral Question, since honourable Isikeli Tuiwalevu is not here to ask Question No. 170/2026, the Question is dropped.

Fiji Resilient in Informal Settlements Programme
(Question No. 166/2026)

HON. K.V. RAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the implementation of the Fiji Resilient in Informal Settlements (FRIS) Programme?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Resilient in Informal Settlements (FRIS) Programme is a climate adaptation initiative, aimed at strengthening the resilience of informal settlements who are particularly vulnerable to climate change and climate risk. This Programme is

funded by the Adaptation Fund with total approved finance of around USD4.2 million which is equivalent to FJD9.2 million, and is implemented in partnership with UN-Habitat, Ministry of Housing, relevant municipal councils and participating communities.

Mr. Speaker, this Programme focusses on informal settlements within the urban areas of Lami, Sigatoka, Nadi and Lautoka. These communities face significant exposure to flooding, coastal inundation, erosion, inadequate drainage, poor sanitation, as well as other climate related hazards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of FRIS is guided by four main components:

- (1) Strengthening national and municipal capacity to assess and effectively respond to climate disaster risks.
- (2) Building community awareness, preparedness and ownership of climate adaptation measures.
- (3) Improving the resilience of physical, natural and social assets within participating settlements.
- (4) Strengthening knowledge, management, monitoring and the sharing of lessons from the programme.

Mr. Speaker, before commencing the capital works, the Programme will undertake a coordinated package of climate risk assessments, technical planning and community capacity activities for 2026-2027 financial year. The University of the South Pacific will be engaged to undertake climate vulnerability assessment and mapping, supported by Geographic Information System analysis for the 16 selected informal settlements.

The Programme will also engage an urban planner or a resilience officer, a climate change planning specialist, a lead engineer and relevant technical officers to prepare community level disaster risk management plans and further develop the priority infrastructure interventions and disaster risk management training and consultation workshops will support community preparedness, ownership and long-term maintenance of the proposed investments.

Mr. Speaker, the preparatory activities are essential because physical interventions must respond to the specific risks, land conditions and needs of each community. The capital works have a total budget of around USD3.2 million, equivalent to FJD7.2 million, covering more than 1,500 households across the 16 informal settlements which include:

Lami

- (1) Bilo
- (2) Kalekana
- (3) Qauia
- (4) Vunivivi
- (5) Wailekutu
- (6) Wainibuku

Sigatoka

- (7) Kulukulu
- (8) Vunikavika

Lautoka

- (9) California Road
- (10) Naqisoro
- (11) Nasoata

- (12) Taiperia
- (13) Veidogo
- (14) Vunato

Nadi

- (15) Korociri
- (16) Nawajikuma

Mr. Speaker, the proposed community level works include improvements to stormwater drainage and sanitation, retaining structures, upgrade footpaths and access roads, installation of rainwater harvesting systems, waste management facilities, coastal protection measures and evacuation centre, introduction of pedestrian bridge and targeted improvements to the most vulnerable housing structures. The programme also provides for community facilities and livelihood support measures including secure storage of livelihood materials. This programme also recognises that the infrastructure alone is not sufficient.

Community members are therefore being engaged in disaster preparedness, environmental management and the protection and maintenance of assets established in the programme. Particular attention has been given to the needs and participation of women, young people, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The Ministry is working closely with UN-Habitat and the relevant stakeholders to accelerate the remaining technical procurement and capital works while ensuring compliance with financial, environmental and social standards.

Mr. Speaker, FRIS complements the current Ministry of Housing's informal settlement and upgrading programme. While the planning programme focusses on infrastructure, services and security of tenure, this programme specifically strengthens the capacity of settlements and institutions to respond to climate change and disaster risk.

Our Ministry and the Coalition Government remains committed to ensuring that families living in informal settlements are not left helpless, especially those that are prone to flooding and other climate change-related risks. Through this programme, we are working, not only to improve physical conditions, but also to build safer, a more prepared and more climate-resilient communities.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
(Question No. 171/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance update Parliament on the US\$80 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in sovereign-backed financing and how will this fund be utilised?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the short answer is, it is part of the funding for a broad range of structural and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening economic management and supporting sustainable development.

The Government has successfully leveraged policy-based budget support financing from various development partners, including the Asian Investment Bank. For the past fiscal years, reforms have focused on:

- Enhancing public financial management;
- Promoting economic growth, as well as strengthening climate and community resilience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, around \$4.3 billion was secured through this modality of financing from 2018 to date. The Government has been working closely with development partners, co-led by the World Bank and ADB, for sub-programme two of Fiji growth and resilience development policy financing. Additional financing is provided on the programme to support the ongoing fuel crisis this year, which has increased total financing to around \$1.06 million. This financing comprises a mix of both grants and concessional loans, with some financing assessed in the last 2025-2026 financial year, while the remaining budget support funds will be drawn during this new financial year, with Government successfully implementing the agreed policy reforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this time to thank all the government ministries and agencies that contributed and supported the completion of the various policy reforms that enabled Government to successfully secure this financing. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has been co-financing the budget support programme. For this fiscal year, the financing of US\$80 million is sourced from their energy, food security, and economic recovery facility. It is provided as a policy-base co-financing with the World Bank's growth and resilience second development policy financing in support of Government's reform and resilience agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as with many other foreign nations, the shocks imposed by the Middle East conflict through higher global energy prices, fuel supply risk, inflationary pressures, and increased stress on fiscal and external balances expose Fiji's vulnerability to its significant reliance on fuel, with fuel imports comprising around 12 percent of GDP. For Fiji, fuel is a critical input for electricity generation, transport, tourism, and inter-island logistics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has taken immediate fiscal and administrative measures to manage these shocks through tightening expenditure control, non-priority spending, overseas travel, non-essential events, and new financial commitments, including measures to manage fuel supply and demand risk as well as targeted support for vulnerable households and key sectors. The objective of these measures were to contain the fiscal impact of the shock, protect our essential public service, and preserve the momentum on priority reforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the AIIB facility would provide timely financing while Fiji faces heightened external stress with limited fiscal buffers. It will preserve foreign exchange reserves while sustaining essential imports, including fuel and food, creating room for targeted and time-bound relief measures. This would ensure that immediate crisis response do not delay key reforms for Fiji's medium-term resilience and growth.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please, note that Question No. 174/2026 has been deferred and will be asked at a later sitting day, as the honourable Minister is still indisposed to illness.

(Question No. 174/2026 deferred)

Written Questions

Cost of Investigation and Prosecution of Former DPP
(Question No. 175/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General inform Parliament on the total amount expended by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) in the investigation and prosecution of former Director of Public

Prosecutions, Mr. Christopher Pryde?

¹ HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to the Written Question.

Street Sweeps in Main Urban Areas
(Question No. 176/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection inform Parliament on the following:

- (a) how is the Ministry conducting the street sweeps in the main urban areas;
- (b) how many people have been assisted; and
- (c) what is the Ministry doing to ensure that they do not return to the streets?

² HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to the Written Question.

Official Overseas Travel for FNPB Board Members
(Question No. 177/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance provide a detailed breakdown of all official overseas travels undertaken from 2023 to date by Board members of the Fiji National Provident Fund, including the following:

- (a) the number and cost of each official trip taken by each Board member, along with the destinations visited and the purpose of each trip and how it helped FNPB;
- (b) the total expenditure incurred on overseas travel by Board members of FNPB, broken down by financial year; and
- (c) the source of funding for each trip, including whether the expenditure was met directly by FNPB or by any other organisation or donor?

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

Unresolved and Pending Cases before LPU & ILSC
(Question No. 178/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General update Parliament on the following:

- (a) the total number of unresolved complaints currently before the Legal Practitioners Unit (LPU), together with a breakdown by the year in which each complaint was received;

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 175/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 176/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister Women, Children and Social Protection, under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

- and
- (b) a breakdown of the number of pending cases before the Independent Legal Services Commission (ILSC) as of 31st October, 2025 to 30th June, 2026?

³ HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 178/2026.

Offices of Legal Aid Commission
(Question No. 179/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General update Parliament on the following information in relation to the Legal Aid Commission:

- (a) the total number of offices operated by the Commission;
- (b) the number of offices operating from leased premises and the annual rent paid for each leased office; and
- (c) whether the Commission owns any buildings, if so, specify?

⁴ HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I table my response to Written Question No. 179/2026.

FICAC Caseload
(Question No. 180/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General update Parliament on the statistics with respect to the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) caseload for the period July 2025 to June 2026 as follows, the:

- (a) total number of complaints received;
- (b) number of cases currently under investigation and those at the prosecution stage; and
- (c) number of successful convictions recorded?

⁵ HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 180/2026.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the next item on the Order Paper. Please, take note that there will be only one Bill for consideration today and this will be for the Third Reading.

As the honourable Prime Minister is unwell and unable to proceed with this item of business, I have authorised the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce and Business Development and Public Enterprises to move the motion instead.

³ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 178/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

⁴ Reply to Written Question No. 179/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure IV.

⁵ Reply to Written Question No. 180/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure V.

STATISTICS BILL 2026

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 27th May, 2026, I move:

That the Statistics Bill 2026 (Bill No. 11/2026), be debated, voted upon and passed.

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

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill marks a step forward by modernising our national statistical architecture and systems. It ensures that the Fiji Bureau of Statistics can operate with professionalism, independence, integrity and in line with global best practice. This legal framework takes into account contemporary statistical practices, emerging data requirements and international principles governing official statistics.

Good governance cannot exist without credible data. Strong economies are not built on assumptions. Effective public policy cannot be driven by guesswork, nations progress when decisions are guided by accurate, timely and transparent information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Statistics Bill is a strategic reform that modernises Fiji's statistical framework to support better governance, stronger accountability and more effective national development planning. It recognizes that quality statistics are essential for informed decision-making and sustainable development.

The Bill strengthens the institutional framework for official statistics by reinforcing the role of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and establishing a statistical advisory council. These measures will enhance coordination, oversight and the responsiveness of the national statistical system to emerging development priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, importantly, the legislation promotes a whole-of-government approach to data management, enabling greater collaboration and more efficient use of information across public institutions. This will improve the quality of evidence available for policy-making while reducing duplication and enhancing public sector efficiency. The Bill also safeguards the professional independence of the Government Statistician and strengthens quality standards for the production of official statistics. These provisions are critical to maintaining public trust and ensuring that official statistics remain credible, objective and reliable.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, the legislation places strong emphasis on protecting privacy and confidentiality, ensuring that data is used responsibly and solely for legitimate statistical purposes. This balance between accessibility and protection will help strengthen confidence in a national statistical system. Overall, the Statistics Bill 2026 provides Fiji with a modern trusted and future ready framework for official statistics, strengthening the country's capacity to deliver evidence-based policies and achieve its long-term development objectives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Statistics Bill strengthens the integrity of our national data systems and ensures that future government policymakers, investors, researchers, and development partners can rely on statistics that are objective, credible and internationally comparable. However, beyond numbers and reports, this legislation is ultimately about people. Data is more than just numbers on a page. It is the truest reflection of our nation's progress and the struggles of our everyday people.

With this Bill, we ensure that our social economic planning is strategically focused, allowing for accurate measurement of poverty, unemployment, cost of living, economic growth, education

outcomes, and target resources to the most vulnerable, and build a stronger and more resilient economy. It empowers our public servants and planners to provide informed advice to the Government and this august House, thereby, ensuring that no Fijian is left behind in our development journey.

I wish to acknowledge the extensive consultations undertaken across the country, from our rural communities and maritime islands to government agencies, statutory bodies, academics and development partners. The overwhelming message was clear. Fiji does need a modern legislative framework to guide the administration and governance of an independent Fiji Bureau of Statistics. I want to thank all the honourable Members in anticipation of their contributions, and I commend this Bill to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide my support to the Statistics Bill 2026 before this House. The Bill modernises Fiji's statistics law to meet international standards and best practise. It improves the quality and reliability of official statistics, strengthens data sharing across government, protects confidentiality, and enables the Fiji Bureau of Statistics to operate with greater professionalism, independence, and integrity, supporting better evidence-based decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me provide a brief background to the Bill. This reform journey commenced in May 2023 when Cabinet approved a comprehensive review to replace the outdated Statistics Act 1961. The Ministry took a lead role in driving and coordinating the review process in close coordination with relevant stakeholders.

The review of the Statistics Act was subsequently announced in the 2023-2024 National Budget, the first budget of the Coalition Government. The reform gained further momentum as one of the key reform actions and was completed as part of 2025-2026 Budget support operations through which the Government was able to secure concessional budget support from our development partners. Following three years of nationwide consultations, the Bill was introduced to Parliament in May this year.

There are key reforms introduced in the Bill. Firstly, providing greater autonomy and independence to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics. This Bill strengthens the professional independence of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics through a transparent, merit-based appointment process, a fixed five-year term for the government statistician, protection from arbitrary removal and explicit protection from ministerial or other interference in statistical methodology, data collection, analysis and publication process. One of the key features of the Bill is the establishment of an independent Statistical Advisory Council that will recommend priorities, guide policies, address data needs and improve quality and relevance of statistics.

Secondly, we will now have a stronger institutional capacity and capability. The Bill strengthens the Fiji Bureau of Statistics as the central statistical authority, provides for the appointment of employees and authorised officers, establishes multi-year and annual statistical programmes, and gives the statistical advisory council a role in advising on staff, equipment, and financial resources.

Thirdly, we have greater legal authority now to collect and access data under this Bill. The Bill gives authorised Fiji Bureau of Statistics officers strong statutory powers to collect information and completed returns, while empowering Fiji Bureau of Statistics to direct public agencies

to provide government records and other relevant information. And apart from this, the Ministry of Finance has progressively supported Fiji Bureau of Statistics with funding to strengthen its capacity and carry out its core responsibility of collecting, analysing, and producing reliable official statistics.

This increased support enabled Fiji Bureau of Statistics to undertake the national statistical activities, including the:

- 2019 CPI and GDP re-basing exercise;
- 2025-2026 household income and expenditure survey; and
- more recently allocated \$12 million in the 2026-2027 national budget for the 2027 population and housing census.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is ultimately about putting our people at the centre of development by using reliable data to better understand poverty, unemployment, cost of living, economic growth, and education outcomes. It will enable the Government to target resources more effectively, strengthen our economy, and ensure that no Fijian is left behind. Mr. Speaker, this Bill before the House is supported.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I will be extremely brief, but just to let you know, I speak on behalf of everyone in the Opposition. We are in support of the Bill and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Committee for the considerable amount of work that was put in, and just to ensure that in terms of independence and protection of the Government Statistician, all that needed to be put into place, was put into place. This is an area that needed reform.

Mr. Speaker, as rightfully pointed out by the honourable Minister for Finance, the Statistics Act 1961 and the Fiji Bureau of Statistics operates under that particular Act and the Census Act 1964. We could see that there is a reform needed and I think it is rightfully now being reformed, to be put into a better place because the world over, everything is data-driven.

Just this morning, I was reading a report where the Minister for Foreign Affairs from Singapore carries around a little machine with him where he just collects every single bit of data that he can everywhere he goes for purposes of looking after Singapore, so you can see what data means to everyone.

For us as a nation, I think in terms of our development, we are now heading towards a complete digitisation of Government, so these things are very important in terms of our development. Having said all of that, we have no objections to the Bill, we support the passage of the Bill wholeheartedly.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me begin by thanking all the Members who have spoken before, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Finance and honourable Koya. Let me make this very important point, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a very good example of how governments should actually bring in new legislations or repeal old legislations and replace it with a new one.

Very early when we came into Government, and as pointed out by the honourable Minister for Finance, we initiated the review of the 1961 Act, and part of the reason why we wanted a very thorough, extensive consultation, even before the Bill was drafted was entirely because of the importance of this institution - the Bureau of Statistics, and the laws that govern the collection, compilation, analysis, and the dissemination of statistics.

I think it comes from the experience that we had in the Opposition and also the experience that I had as a consumer of government statistics in my academic role, where academics, researchers,

development partners, investors, those who look at a particular country, where to invest, how to deal with them, foreign policy, et cetera. A large amount of the analysis and the assessment is dependent on the reliability, the importance of the availability of statistics generally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point that we want to make is, for good governance, it should never fear good statistics, independent statistics, because they strengthen government policy. Good policy comes from good statistics, reliable statistics, and independent statistics. I think both the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance quite clearly laid out all the good features of this Bill, especially the independence of the Bureau of Statistics Office, the professional independence that is provided to the experts in there to collect and analyse statistics, is a very important element in this Bill. In fact, there are about eight or nine very important features of this Bill which strengthen that. I think this Bill is going to be good for Fiji. It is sending a very clear signal to everyone that would be looking at Fiji as to how we do our policymaking, based on solid professional independent statistics.

This is a very timely Bill. The old Act of 1961 has been completely repealed. This is a new Bill, a new Act which will govern statistics for the future. Even more important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the rapid escalation. The AI revolution is probably the shortest revolution and the most far-reaching in the world's history. We do not even know right now exactly where and how the whole AI revolution, its impact on statistics, its impact on policy is going to be. I think this is a very good and timely enactment of an Act to govern statistics, how we collect it, how we analyse it, and how we make it available to the broader community for policy and for the implementation of those policies based on facts.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully endorse the Bill, commend the Bill, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all those people - the former Bureau of Statistics Chief, Mr. Kemueli Naiqama, whom we brought back as the CEO, Ministry of Finance, and all those people in the National Planning Office who were initially involved in undertaking this work. I am very happy that this Bill has finally come to Parliament and is going to be approved today with strong bipartisan support and I want to thank the Opposition and honourable Koya for his support for the Bill.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise obviously to express my sincere gratitude on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister to this august House for the contributions to the debate on the Bill, and of course, the bipartisan support of this Bill. I wish to congratulate the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their outstanding efforts in carefully deliberating on all submissions relating to the Bill and concerns raised throughout the consultation process and reaching its decision that the Committee is satisfied with the objectives of the Bill and that their concerns raised had been addressed.

While the Committee recommended several minor amendments to improve clarity and drafting consistency, I am pleased that the Committee has unanimously agreed that the Bill provides an appropriate legislative framework for the establishment and operation of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today Parliament has done more than passing a legislation. We have strengthened one of the most important foundations of modern governance - trust in facts, trust in institutions, and trust in evidence-based decision-making. This Bill now will move into an Act and marks a step forward by modernising our national statistical architecture and system. It ensures that the Fiji Bureau of Statistics can operate with professionalism, independence, and integrity in line with global best practise. This legal framework takes into account contemporary statistical practises, emerging data requirements, and international principles governing official statistics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, good governance cannot exist without credible data. Strong economies are not built on assumptions; effective public policy cannot be driven by guesswork. Nations progress when decisions are guided by accurate, timely, and transparent information. And this is what this legislation precisely delivers. But beyond the numbers and reports, this legislation ultimately is about people.

Data is more than just numbers on a page. It is the truest reflection of a nation's progress and struggles of our everyday people. With this Act, we ensure that our socio-economic planning is strategically focused on the right areas, and it empowers our public servants and planners to provide informed advice to government and, of course, this august House.

I wish to thank everyone for their contributions today. I wish to pay tribute to the hardworking staff of the Bureau of Statistics and also to the former CEO for the Bureau of Statistics, His Excellency, Kemueli Naiqama, and also to the former Minister for Finance, had initiated this process, and also to the current honourable Minister for Finance and the Permanent Secretary as well.

History, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will not judge us just by policies we dream, but how accurately and, honestly, we measure them and achieve them. Today, this Parliament has accorded to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics a modern legal architecture that allows it, not only to function independently, but to also produce quality statistics that inform credible, transparent, evidence-based government policies and decision-making for the betterment of our nation.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to provide for the collection, compilation, analysis, and publication of certain statistical information and for related matters (Bill No. 11 of 2026), enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No. of 2026)]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting. I thank you all for your contributions. Before we adjourn, for Members who may have an interest in the latest news from Ashwin, there were only two items he imparted to me in our bread run early this morning.

First is that OFC Soccer championship, and I believe the honourable Minister for Sports will tell you, of which I have not heard before until this morning, stands for Oceania Football Confederation, which is a premier soccer competition of the region. Well, unfortunately, he says, Rewa lost 3-1 to Auckland FC, and Vanuatu Club beat Solomon Islands Club by a score of 3-1. All these games were played in 4R Stadium, Ba. Next year, the Ba Football District team will represent Fiji at the OFC, and he is confident that we will win, so watch this space.

(Laughter)

Second, he said that the Adi Cakobau School student boarders are beginning to leave the school for their term's holidays as from the beginning of this week. How does he know? He transported, as his fair, a mother to go to the school to pick her daughter up, and in the course of their conversation, which Ashwin is very good at, the proud parent revealed the arrangement to him. And he, in turn, as he invariably always does, passed the information on to me - like it or not.

(Laughter)

I hope we are not trespassing onto the honourable Minister for Education's space.

Why, you may ask, I do indulge myself in conveying such trivial matters to the Members of Parliament of the Republic of Fiji? Well, it is my way of assuring every honourable Member of this House that despite the loud and ruckus debates and finger-pointing accusations in this House, almost everything outside amongst our people is normal. That is the message and the lesson that I, as the Chair, wish to share with you tonight. So, we will adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.12 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 175/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 1853)



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

Reply to Question No. 175/2026 is as follows:

The Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption reports that the total expenditure attributable to the investigation and prosecution of the matter concerning the former Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Christopher Pryde, was approximately \$19,022. Of that amount, approximately \$11,000 represents the Commission's internal investigation and legal costs attributable to staff time, while approximately \$8,022 was incurred in New Zealand in relation to the service of court documents and associated process.

For context, the charges concerned an alleged total of \$193,326.64, comprising alleged gratuity payments, alleged reimbursement monies received contrary to applicable procurement requirements, and alleged airline reimbursement monies. Accordingly, the Commission's estimated expenditure of \$19,022 should be understood in the context of the nature and financial value of the matters which were the subject of the proceedings.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 176/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection (Ref. Page 1853)



MINISTER FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
(Hon. S. Kiran)

Reply to Question No. 176/2026 is as follows:

- (a) The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection in Fiji conducts regular, multi-agency operations to provide outreach, protection, and rehabilitation for people living, begging, or sleeping on the streets, focusing on addressing the root causes of family breakdown and complex social issues. The ministry profiles individuals to offer tailored interventions, including family reunification, medical care, vocational training, and securing alternative accommodation, while treating children in need of care rather than as offenders.

Recent operations in July and August 2026, including in Suva, Nausori, Lautoka, Nadi, Sigatoka and Labasa, have successfully reintegrated individuals, placed others in residential facilities, such as the Kauwai Restoration Home, and provided support to young men through the Blue Light Training Programme.

The Ministry conducts these operations through a coordinated, multi-agency approach on a regular basis. Our partners include Municipal Councils, the Fiji Police Force, Medical Services Pacific, Empower Pacific, city and town rangers, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, District Officers, faith-based organisations, civil society organisations and other relevant agencies. The approach may differ from one urban centre to another because the circumstances and needs of those found on the streets are not always the same.

The Ministry's team and partner agencies conduct awareness, identify and profile people living, sleeping or begging on the streets, and assess the circumstances of each person. These have included outreach to those sleeping under bridges in Suva and Nausori, at bus shelters and in other public places.

Where possible, the profiling teams also visit the homes of relatives. This allows the Ministry to verify information, assess whether family reintegration is safe and explore suitable accommodation or care arrangements. The interventions include:

- Profiling of the individual to determine personal details.
- Ascertaining of identification and access to social protection services.
- Exploring of options to temporary accommodation or placement in an appropriate residential facility.
- Referrals for education, vocational training, employment or substance-abuse rehabilitation.
- Specialised protection and care for children found on the streets.

People requiring urgent medical assistance are referred for treatment. Older persons requiring residential care may be referred, following an assessment, to an appropriate aged care institution or partner facility, like St. Vincent's Home. The facilities are informed of any

continuing medical, counselling or welfare needs, and provided with clothing, food and other needed supplies.

In Suva and Nausori, interventions focused particularly on people found sleeping under bridges and those requiring medical assistance. Relatives were identified in some cases, and family reintegration was explored. However, some individuals chose to remain on the streets. Adults sleeping at bus shelters were also offered alternative accommodation, but some declined placement in residential institutions.

Children found on the streets in circumstances that place their safety and wellbeing at risk are treated as children in need of care and protection - not as offenders. The Ministry's immediate priority is to ensure their safety and wellbeing. They are provided with food, clothing, safe shelter and other necessary assistance while our officers undertake appropriate assessment and case management. Where it is safe and in the best interests of the child, we work with the family towards reunification and strengthening the family environment. Where this is not possible, appropriate alternative care is arranged to ensure the child remains protected.

The Ministry also works with the Police on targeted operations. In Nasinu, for example, teams monitor areas around Vivrass and Nayan Supermarket, following concerns about children selling roti parcels and puddings late at night. Families are visited, and if in hardship, are provided with livelihood option with warning and action taken against repeat offenders. These operations are intended to protect children from exploitation, abuse and other dangers associated with being on the streets at night.

(b) How many people have been assisted?

The recent Lautoka operation in July profiled 56 people, comprising 20 people engaged in begging and 36 street dwellers. Out of eight senior citizens, five chose to return home, assisted by our team, and three were taken into aged care facilities. Twelve youths, including four girls, were taken into care facilities. It was found that beggars are on social protection support and have been offered livelihood programmes. They have been warned by Lautoka City Council and action will be taken against repeat offenders.

Approximately 75 percent of those profiled were young people between the ages of 15 and 35. This highlights the need for active parenting and family support for prevention, education, rehabilitation, skills training and employment opportunities for young people.

As part of the wider intervention for children removed from unsafe street situations, nine boys are currently being supported at Kauwai Restoration Home in Raiwaqa. Most are between 14 and 17 years of age.

Of these nine boys, six have been enrolled in and are attending secondary school, while three are being assisted to enrol in vocational education and skills training. Because they are below 18, care orders are necessary and have been secured for seven of the boys, while the Ministry is working to finalise the remaining two care orders.

To give an example of support provided, a 16-year-old girl, picked up from the streets of Lautoka is being supported in a safe residential facility. She is under an interim care order and is receiving appropriate healthcare and welfare support. She is also attending sewing classes to develop practical skills. Family tracing and reintegration efforts have been undertaken; however, reintegration has not yet been successful. The Ministry is, therefore, continuing to ensure her safety, and make the necessary care arrangements.

This case show that the Ministry's interventions go beyond removing children from the streets. They include securing legal protection, providing safe accommodation, returning children to school, arranging vocational training, addressing their health needs and working towards safe and sustainable family reintegration.

In Nadi, operations conducted in the last month identified a total of 12 individuals - eight street dwellers and four beggars. Four needed medical interventions, five were reintegrated with family, and three were placed at a shelter.

The Ministry's recent street outreach and profiling exercise in Labasa included an evening operation conducted on 7th August, 2026. The exercise identified and profiled four male street dwellers and persons engaged in begging. While the number may appear small, individual circumstances identified demonstrate that street dwelling is often the visible result of much more complex social issues of family breakdown and neglect.

In Sigatoka, the streets are currently clear of identified street dwellers and persons engaged in begging. Our officers will continue to monitor the situation and maintain regular engagement with relevant stakeholders so that any emerging cases can be identified and addressed early.

(b) What is the Ministry doing to ensure that they do not return to the streets?

Removing a person from the street and placing that person in a home or shelter does not, by itself, resolve the circumstances that led the person to the streets. The Ministry, therefore, undertakes individual assessments and case management to determine the specific needs of each person. Support may include family tracing and mediation, medical treatment, counselling, safe accommodation, education, vocational training, rehabilitation and access to social protection assistance.

When people are reintegrated with their families, the Ministry may provide further support based on an assessment of need. This can include social protection assistance, livelihood options, clothing, and referrals to other Government or partner services.

A total of 28 young men successfully completed the Blue Light Training Programme in partnership with the Fiji Police Force. The Programme promoted discipline, responsibility, respect, and positive decision-making. They took part in teamwork, life skills training, mentoring and self-awareness abilities. Educational and employment pathways were identified as part of this programme.

It is worth noting that no individual found on the street is homeless. Everyone comes from a family/community. Many have disconnected from their family because of disagreements, abandonment, addiction or desire to live free from family obligations.

It is also important to recognise that adults cannot be compelled to remain with their families or in residential institutions. Some people decline the accommodation offered or later choose to return to the streets. This is why continuing outreach, counselling, family engagement and follow-up support are essential. Most are able to get back to education or employment only after rehabilitation support.

The Ministry is building a recovery facility especially for vulnerable children as a transitional facility and strengthening its response through partnerships with different organisations. In partnership with Empower Pacific, we have established Na Salavou, a drug rehabilitation facility for children. We support Salvation Army Kauwai Restoration Facility which is a

transitional facility for children found on the streets. Salvation Army has established Drug Rehabilitation Facility in Suva, and we support their facility in providing shelter for girls. These initiatives help address existing gaps and provide more specialised care and rehabilitation services, particularly for children and young people with complex needs.

Once children are in these facilities, we then try and match their interest with opportunities and enrol them in different educational facilities. We have placed children in Chevalier Homes, including their vocational facility, as well as CATD Nadave facility. We are grateful to vocational facilities and employers who help create opportunities after rehabilitation efforts.

We work with Medical Services Pacific for the medical needs of those identified on the streets to ensure timely medical support. We also work with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services for those identified with mental health challenges. Ministry of Health takes responsibility for treatment and support integration in their families.

We have found that many young people who loiter in towns are from nearby settlements and return home so there has been a lot of effort to reach out to these settlements offering support, educational, sport and livelihood opportunities in partnership with Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Employment, Ministry of Local Government and Faith based organisations including Inspire Pacific.

Preventing people from returning to the streets is the responsibility of whole of society. It requires the cooperation of families, the Police, health services, municipal councils, faith-based institutions, civil society organisations, employers, training providers and local communities. The Ministry, therefore, invites agencies and development partners wishing to support this work to engage with us. We welcome discussions on the services already available and the remaining gaps in accommodation, specialised care, rehabilitation, skills development and sustainable reintegration.

The goal is not merely to move people from public spaces. Our goal is to restore their safety and dignity, address the causes that brought them to the streets, and give them the support and opportunities needed to rebuild their lives.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 178/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 1854)



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

Reply to Question No. 178/2026 is as follows:

(a)

YEAR	UNRESOLVED COMPLAINTS
2009	2
2010	14
2011	16
2012	44
2013	62
2014	78
2015	89
2016	96
2017	100
2018	114
2019	116
2020	114
2021	106
2022	122
2023	120
2024	108
2025	132
2026	97
TOTAL	1,530

(b) Summary of Pending Disciplinary Proceedings:

- Total Pending Cases (as of 31st October, 2025 to 30th June, 2026) - 9.
- New Cases Registered/Filed (1st November, 2025 to 30th June, 2026) - 12.
- Cases Disposed/Completed (1st November, 2025 to 30th June, 2026) - 3.

Breakdown by Category of Misconduct/Status:

- (1) Professional Misconduct Applications: 5 cases currently pending determination.
- (2) Unsatisfactory Professional Conduct Applications: 4 cases currently pending determination.
- (3) Matters Awaiting Judgment/Rulings: 1 case where hearings have concluded and decisions are reserved.

ANNEXURE IV

Reply to Written Question No. 179/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 1854)



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

Reply to Question No. 179/2026 is as follows:

- (a) (i) The Legal Aid Commission currently operates a total of 26 Offices as follows:

CENTRAL/EASTERN DIVISION					
	Location	Landlord	Department/Unit	Remarks	Rented/Not Rented
1	41 Loftus Street, Suva	Government of Fiji	Criminal Unit and IT Dept	Operational	Non-Rented
2	16 Kimberly Street, Suva	Dynex holding Ltd	Family Unit	Operational	Rented
3	73 Gordon Street, Suva	Pars South Pacific	Headquarters	Operational	Rented
4	3 Thurston Street, Suva	Pacific Conference of Churches	Logistic Unit	Storage	Rented
5	Waimaro Circuit Society Building, Korovou	Roopesh Gift Shop Pte Ltd	Korovou Office	Operational	Rented
6	Level 3, Nausori Plaza, Nausori	Ding Jin Real Estate Development Pte	Nausori Office	Operational	Rented
7	Lomaiviti Holdings Building, Beach Street, Levuka	Lomaiviti Holdings Ltd	Levuka office	Operational	Rented
8	Ground Floor, Level 1 and Level 2, Valelevu Complex	Fast Build Construction Services Ltd	Nasinu Office	Operational	Rented
9	Lot 4 Naitonitoni Road, Navua	Ashok Chand T/A Shiu Shankarand Son	Navua Office	Operational	Rented
WESTERN DIVISION					
10	Level 1, Magistrates Court Complex, Sigatoka	Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Council	Sigatoka office	Operational	Non-Rented
11	1st Floor, GT Plaza, Nadi	M.B. Pala Investment	Nadi Office	Operational	Rented
12	Level 1, Magistrates Court Complex, Lautoka	Ba Provincial Council	Lautoka Criminal Unit	Operational	Non-Rented
13	Nuqa Place, Marine Drive, Lautoka (Office 6)	Reddy Dimond Northern Ltd T/A Long Run Fuji	Lautoka Civil Unit	Operational	Rented
14	Nuqa Place, Marine Drive, Lautoka (Office 2)	Reddy Dimond Northern Ltd T/A Long Run Fuji	Lautoka Conflict Unit	Operational	Rented
15	Magistrate Court Complex, Old Bridge Road, Ba	Judicial Department	Ba Office	Operational	Non-Rented
16	1st Floor, Dalpat Singh Building, Tavua	Surendra & Amba Ben	Tavua Office	Operational	Rented
17	1st Floor, Naidu's Investment Building, Rakiraki	Naidu's Investment Ltd	Rakiraki Office	Operational	Rented
18	Government Station, Keyasi	Ministry of Rural and Maritime	Keiyasi Office	Visiting Office (used during court sittings)	Non-Rented
19	New Court Complex, Ba	Judicial Department	Ba Court House Office	Supplementary Office Space	Non-Rented
NORTHERN DIVISION					
20	Old Court House Building, Jaduram Street, Labasa	Government of Fiji	Labasa Office	Operational	Non-Rented

21	70 Seaqaqa Township, Seaqaqa	Fijian Cane Farmers Corporative Ltd	Seaqaqa Office	Operational	Rented
22	Naulumatua House, Nabouwalu	Ministry of Rural and Maritime	Nabouwalu Office	Operational	Non-Rented
23	Level 1, Vunilagi House, Main Street, Savusavu	Cakaudrove Provincial Holding Company Ltd	Savusavu Office	Operational	Non-Rented
24	First Light Inn Building, Ground Floor, Taveuni	Maqaiviti Holdings Ltd	Taveuni Office	Operational	Rented
MARITIME OFFICE (Visiting Office – Used during Court Sitzings)					
25	Vunisea, Kadavu	Kadavu Provincial Council	Kadavu Office	Visiting	Non-Rented
26	Ahau Government Station, Rotuma	Rotuma Council	Rotuma Office	Visiting	Non-Rented

(ii) The Legal Aid Commission Office Summary:

Division	Total Office	Operational	Storage	Visiting/Supplementary	Rented	Non Rented
Central/ Eastern	9	8	1	0	8	1
Western	10	8	0	2	5	5
Northern	5	5	0	0	2	3
Maritime	2	0	0	2	0	2
Total	26	21	1	4	15	11

- (b) The Legal Aid Commission currently operates 15 Offices from leased premises and pays a monthly rental of \$81,556.92 VIP and annual rental of \$979,103.04 VIP. The Annual rental paid for 15 leased Offices are as follows:

NO.	LANDLORD	ADDRESS	LOCATION	AGREEMENT START DATE	AGREEMENT END DATE	MONTHLY RENTAL VIP (\$)	ANNUAL RENTAL VIP (\$)
CENTRAL DIVISION (7 Offices)							
1	Roopesh Gift Shop Pte Ltd	Waimaro Circuit Society Building, Korovou	Korovou	5/2/2024	5/1/2029	593.46	7,121.52
2	Ding Jin Real Estate Development Pte	Level 3, Nausori Plaza, Nausori	Nausori	9/1/2024	8/31/2029	5,562.50	66,750.00
3	Fast Build Construction Services Ltd	Ground floor, Level 1 & 2 Valelevu Complex, Nasinu	Nasinu	7/31/2024	7/31/2029	8,339.07	100,488.84
4	Dynex Holdings Limited	16 Kimberly Street, Suva	Suva - Family	9/1/2021	8/31/2031	9,900.00	118,800.00
5	PARS South Pacific	73 Gordon Street, Stands House	Suva - Headquarters	10/11/2024	10/10/2029	34,239.13	410,869.56
6	Pacific Conference of Churches	3 Thurston Street, Pacific Conference of Churches	Suva - Conflict	8/1/2024	7/31/2029	3,100.50	37,206.00
7	Ashok Chand T/A Shiu Shankar and Sons	Lot 4 Naitonitoni Road, Navua	Navua	7/1/2023	6/30/2028	675.00	8,100.00
WESTERN DIVISION (5 Offices)							
8	M.B.Pala Investment	1st Floor GT Plaza	Nadi	12/1/2020	11/30/2030	4,408.30	52,899.60

9	Reddy Dimond Northern Ltd T/A Long Run Fuji	Nuqa Place, Marine Drive Lautoka (Office 6)	Lautoka - Civil Unit	7/1/2021	6/30/3031	5,298.39	63,580.68
10		Nuqa Place, Marine Drive Lautoka (Office 2)	Lautoka - Conflict Unit	7/1/2021	6/30/3031	2,903.83	34,845.96
11	Surendra & Amba Ben	1st Floor Dalpat Singh Building	Tavua	10/1/2024	9/30/2029	1,341.74	16,100.88
12	Naidu's Investment Ltd	1st Floor Naidu's Investment Building	Rakiraki	1/2/2023	1/1/2028	2,025.00	24,300.00
NORTHERN DIVISION (2 Offices)							
13	Maqaiviti Holdings Ltd	First Light Inn Building Ground Floor	Taveuni	2/1/2025	1/31/2030	1,350.00	16,200.00
14	Fijian Cane Farmers Cooperative Ltd	70 Seaqaqa Township	Seaqaqa	1/2/2023	1/1/2033	1,000.00	12,000.00
EASTERN DIVISION (1 Office)							
15	Lomaiviti Provincial Council	Lomaiviti Holdings Building Beach Street	Levuka	1/2/2021	1/1/2028	820.00	9,840.00
Total of 15 Rented Offices						81,556.92	979,103.04

- (c) The Legal Aid Commission currently does not own any building as property under its name. However, the Commission was allocated through Government two buildings, which is owned by the Government of Fiji as follows:
- (1) Loftus Building located in Suva was allocated to Legal Aid Commission in 2011; and
 - (2) Labasa Office (Old Labasa Court House) was allocated to Legal Aid Commission in June 2014.

ANNEXURE V

Reply to Written Question No. 180/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 1854)



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

Reply to Question No. 180/2026 is as follows:

- (a) In response to the honourable Member's question, the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption advises that for the period 1st July, 2025 to 30th June, 2026, the Commission received a total of 407 complaints.
- (b) The Commission dealt with 508 investigation files across its Suva, Lautoka and Labasa Offices during the reporting period. As at 30th June, 2026, 182 investigation files remained active, comprising 125 in Suva, 29 in Lautoka and 28 in Labasa. In addition, 141 matters were at the prosecution stage. A further 19 matters were before the courts on appeal, bringing the total number of live court matters to 160. The appeal matters are separately identified and are not included in the 141 matters at prosecution stage.
- (c) The Commission recorded 18 successful convictions during the reporting period. These figures reflect the Commission's caseload and court outcomes for the relevant reporting.