PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.35 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts; the honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs; honourable Sanjay S. Kirpal; and honourable Ketan Kirit Lal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 2nd November 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

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.

Receipt/Circulation of Written Response

For the information of honourable Members, the Secretariat has received written response from the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Service and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics and Public Enterprises to Written Question No. 247/2026 asked by the honourable Leader of the Opposition. The response has been conveyed to the honourable Leader of the Opposition, and a copy made available on Parliament's website.

Consolidation of Oral and Written Questions on the Order Paper

For the information of honourable Members, the Business Committee, in exercise of its powers under Standing Order 124(4)(c), had taken a decision on Thursday, 29th October, 2026, to consolidate Monday and Tuesday's questions on today's Order Paper. You will note the 14 Oral Questions and 5 Written Questions on today's Order Paper, and in further respect, Standing Order 41(4) and Standing Order 42(1) are suspended only during Question Time today.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance (Veitacini Treaty)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I rise to present the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

Review Report on the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance (Veitacini Treaty).

The Committee acknowledges the significance of these treaties in strengthening Fiji's longstanding bilateral relationship with Australia and the opportunities they present for economic development, national security, infrastructure, health, education, climate resilience and regional cooperation. However, Sir, the Committee recognises that these opportunities must be carefully considered against the legal, constitutional, financial and strategic implications of the commitments Fiji may assume upon ratification.

In undertaking its review, the Committee examined the provisions of both treaties, the accompanying written analysis and submissions received from government ministries and agencies, stakeholders and members of the public. The Committee's deliberations identified substantive concerns specific to each treaty, particularly regarding the preservation of Fiji's sovereignty, independent foreign policy, national security, institutional accountability and long-term development interests.

In relation to the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union, the Committee acknowledges its potential to strengthen economic cooperation, infrastructure development, education, health services, climate resilience and people-to-people relations. However, concerns were raised regarding the implications of closer economic and institutional integration, Fiji's ability to maintain independent relationships with other development partners, the protection of critical infrastructure and sovereign data, and the transparency of the proposed ten-year work plan and financial commitments.

The Committee further notes concerns regarding the sustainability of development assistance, the distinction between grants and loans, and the need for clear implementation responsibilities, measurable outcomes and Parliamentary oversight. While the term *vuvale* reflects family, trust and mutual responsibility, the Committee considers it essential that the partnership recognise the differences in economic capacity between Fiji and Australia and ensure that co-operation does not create disproportionate dependence or undermine Fiji's sovereign decision-making.

In relation to the Ocean of Peace Alliance (Veitacini Treaty), the Committee expresses particular concern regarding the interpretation and potential implications of mutual defence obligations, visiting forces arrangements, foreign military presence, intelligence sharing, third-party security engagements and the protection of Fiji's constitutional authority over defence and national security decisions. The Committee emphasises the need for clear legal and operational safeguards concerning military deployments, jurisdiction, accountability, environmental protection and parliamentary scrutiny for future defence arrangements.

The Committee also recognises concerns regarding the potential implications of the Treaty for Fiji's independent and non-aligned foreign policy, particularly its ability to maintain balanced relationships with other international partners. While *veitacini* reflects kinship and mutual respect, the Committee considers that defence cooperation must preserve equality between the parties and must not expose Fiji to security commitments or strategic obligations that are inconsistent with its national interests.

Regarding the treaty process, negotiations and safeguards, the Committee considers it important to formally record procedural gaps identified during its review. The Committee expresses concern that, despite the Office of the Solicitor-General being invited to engage with the Committee for over a month, and subsequently being provided with written questions instead, no response has been received to-date, thereby limiting the Committee's ability to obtain authoritative legal clarification on significant provisions of the treaties.

The Committee also further notes concern regarding the limited involvement of relevant

Divisions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in the treaty process and the absence of comprehensive public consultation before the treaties were signed. These matters underscore the importance of strengthening legal scrutiny, inter-agency coordination, institutional accountability and meaningful engagement with traditional and community leaders, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, youth and other relevant stakeholders in the formulation of international agreements.

The Committee further emphasises that both treaties must be considered within the broader context of Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, its longstanding commitment to being friends to all and enemies to none, and its leadership in advancing the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration. The Committee considers it essential that Fiji maintain an independent foreign policy, diversify its international partnerships and undertake comprehensive assessments of the long-term strategic implications of both treaties, including potential future security scenarios. The Committee maintains that lasting peace and regional stability must be supported by sustainable development, strengthened national institutions and the ability of Pacific Island countries to determine their own future.

The Committee also identified drafting and editorial inconsistencies in the Treaty documents that warrant attention. These include a typographical error in the signature block, which reads "FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI", the absence of a definition of "Party" despite the distinction between signatories and acceding States under Article 12, and the failure to clearly identify the signatories to both the Veitacini Treaty, and the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union. While these may appear to be technical matters, they raise concerns regarding the adequacy of legal scrutiny, proofreading and quality assurance undertaken before the treaties were finalised and signed. The Committee emphasises the importance of ensuring that international agreements undergo rigorous legal and editorial review to safeguard their clarity, accuracy and integrity, particularly given their potential legal and policy implications for Fiji.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends that Parliament defer the approval of the ratification of both Treaties in their present form and that the Government undertake further negotiations with Australia to address the concerns identified in this Report. The Committee emphasises that deferral does not constitute rejection of the treaties or Fiji's longstanding friendship with Australia. Rather, it provides an opportunity to secure appropriate legal safeguards, clarify treaty obligations, disclose implementation arrangements and strengthen mechanisms for parliamentary scrutiny and democratic accountability. The Committee maintains that Fiji can remain a trusted friend and development partner of Australia while preserving its sovereignty, constitutional authority and independence in determining its foreign policy and national security priorities.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend my appreciation to the Government Ministries and agencies, organisations and members of the public, who contributed to this review through their submissions and engagement. I also acknowledge the dedication and commitment of my Committee Members in undertaking this important examination. On behalf of the Committee, I submit this Report to Parliament for its consideration.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Review Report on the Personal Insolvency, Financial Rehabilitation and Entrepreneurial Rescue Bill 2025

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee's Review Report on the Personal Insolvency, Financial Rehabilitation and Entrepreneurial

Rescue Bill 2025 (Bill No. 40 of 2025). This Bill represents a significant reform of Fiji's personal insolvency framework and introduces a modern, balanced and humane approach to addressing financial distress experienced by individuals and small entrepreneurs.

The Bill was referred to the Committee for scrutiny in accordance with the Standing Orders of Parliament. In carrying out its mandate, the Committee carefully examined the provisions of the Bill and considered whether the proposed legislative framework adequately addresses the challenges faced by debtors while maintaining fairness to creditors. The Committee notes that the Bill seeks to achieve important public policy objectives by providing relief to honest but unfortunate debtors facing unsustainable financial obligations, while ensuring that creditors retain fair opportunities for debt recovery.

The Bill also promotes entrepreneurship and economic participation by introducing practical debt restructuring and rehabilitation pathways that enable financially distressed individuals to recover and re-engage productively in the economy, rather than face permanent financial exclusion. A notable feature of the Bill is its graduated approach to insolvency through the introduction of debt protection moratoriums, debt restructuring arrangements, debt rehabilitation orders and a modernised bankruptcy process, providing debtors with solutions proportionate to their circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee welcomes provisions that protect essential household assets, reasonable income and Fiji National Provident Fund savings, thereby safeguarding the dignity and welfare of affected individuals and their families. The Bill further strengthens transparency and accountability through the establishment of a Personal Insolvency Register and clear obligations imposed on debtors, insolvency practitioners and creditors. The inclusion of enforcement mechanisms also serves to deter abuse of the insolvency system and maintain public confidence in its administration.

Overall, the Committee is of the view that the Bill is a progressive and timely reform that aligns Fiji's insolvency regime with contemporary international practices while remaining responsive to Fiji's economic and social realities. It provides greater certainty, fairness and efficiency in the management of personal insolvency and contributes to broader goals of financial inclusion, economic resilience and entrepreneurial development. While the Committee has recommended several amendments to improve the clarity, consistency and operational effectiveness of the Bill, it is satisfied that the legislation provides an appropriate and comprehensive framework for the administration of personal insolvency, financial rehabilitation and entrepreneurial rescue in Fiji.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their diligence, constructive engagement and valuable contributions throughout the review process. I also acknowledge the stakeholders and members of the public who contributed to the Committee's deliberations through their submissions and participation in the consultation process. On behalf of the Committee, I commend this Report to Parliament and respectfully seek the support of all honourable Members for this important legislative reform.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 27th November, 2025, the Standing Committee has tabled its Report, and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 5th November 2026.

Review Report on the Fiji Police Bill 2026

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee’s Review Report on the Fiji Police Bill 2026 (Bill No. 12 of 2026). Following its

referral to the Committee, the Committee undertook an extensive review of the Bill, including clause-by-clause analysis, consultations with the Ministry responsible for policing, consideration of independent legal advice, and public consultations conducted throughout Fiji. The Committee also received written submissions from individuals, civil society organisations, professional bodies, and other stakeholders. These engagements ensured that the Committee's review was informed by a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

The Bill seeks to repeal and replace the Police Act 1965, which has governed policing in Fiji for more than sixty years. In its place, the Bill establishes a modern legislative framework for the administration, governance and operations of the Fiji Police Force. It introduces significant reforms relating to police powers, investigations, forensic procedures, digital evidence, disciplinary processes and community policing, while also seeking to align policing practices with the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and contemporary international standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, throughout its review, the Committee carefully examined whether the proposed framework strikes an appropriate balance between empowering the Police Force to effectively prevent and investigate crime, and ensuring that such powers are exercised lawfully, proportionately, transparently and with adequate safeguards. Particular attention was given to provisions relating to warrantless searches, surveillance powers, digital device access, forensic procedures, accountability mechanisms, and the protection of constitutional rights and freedoms. The Committee acknowledges that many of these issues were consistently raised during public consultations and through written submissions received from stakeholders and members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee further recognised the importance of modernising Fiji's policing framework to address the emerging challenges, including organised crime, transnational offences, cybercrime, digital investigations and the increasing reliance on scientific and forensic evidence. At the same time, the Committee was mindful that public confidence in policing depends not only on effective law enforcement but also on strong oversight, transparency, professionalism and respect for human rights.

In undertaking its review, the Committee proposed a number of amendments aimed at improving the clarity, consistency and operation of the Bill. These amendments seek to strengthen accountability mechanisms, address drafting issues, enhance safeguards around the exercise of police powers, and ensure that the legislation reflects the concerns and recommendations raised during the consultation process. The Committee is satisfied that the amendments recommended in this Report improve the Bill while preserving its overall policy objectives.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend my sincere appreciation to all individuals and organisations who participated in the review process by making written and oral submissions. I also acknowledge the Ministry responsible for Policing, Office of the Solicitor-General, and all stakeholders who assisted the Committee throughout its deliberations. Their contributions, Sir, greatly assisted the Committee in carrying out its constitutional and parliamentary duties.

I would also like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their diligence and constructive engagement through the review process. Their contributions have been instrumental in ensuring a comprehensive examination of this important legislation. On behalf of the Committee, I commend this Report to Parliament and seek the support of all honourable Members of this august House for its passage.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday,

28th May, 2026, the Standing Committee has tabled its Report and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 5th November, 2026.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

El Nino Drought: Impacts on Fiji's Water Supply and National Response

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to update this House on the *El Nino* drought, its impact on public water supply across Fiji, and the response being led by the Water Authority of Fiji, together with the National Disaster Risk Management Office and our partner agencies.

Water is the first of all essential services. When it fails, schools struggle to stay open, health facilities are put under pressure, businesses lose trade and families carry the burden. That burden falls hardest on mothers and children, on the elderly and on persons with disabilities. That is why Government is treating this drought period with the seriousness it deserves.

My Statement this morning covers four matters:

(1) Where things stand nationally, using data gauged on 1st November, 2026.
(2) How the drought is affecting supply needs of the Water Authority's three service regions.
(3) The Water Authority's role in national disaster coordination and the assistance rendered to our communities.
(4) Our plans for the months ahead, as *El Nino* is expected to strengthen into early 2027.

The Fiji Meteorological Services advises a very high chance of very dry conditions for October to December 2026, with *El Nino* likely to be very strong into early 2027. The rain has already failed in parts of our country. In the Western Division, September brought only 10.5 millimetres of rain and October between zero and six millimetres. In the North, rainfall from July to September was about 36 percent of average. The Water Authority of Fiji monitors 44 operational water sources nationally, 16 in the Northern region, 13 in the Western region, and 15 in the Central Eastern region. As gauged on 1st November 2026:

(1) 18 sources of 41 percent are at normal,
(2) 7 sources of 15.91 percent are approaching critical, and
(3) 19 sources of 43 percent are critical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give the House a sense of how quickly this has moved. On 15th September, seven of our 44 sources were critical; by 29th October, 18 were critical; as of 1st November, the number is 19. Over the same seven weeks, the number of sources at normal has fallen from 31 to 18. Today, about 24,600 people are affected, meaning they are on intermittent supply or are relying on water carting. That is 18,798 people in the Western region, 3,500 in the Northern region, and 2,276 in the Central /Eastern region. So, the great majority of the Water Authority's customers continue to receive supply, but the margin is thin and it is narrowing every week as the rain stays away.

For the Western region, which is the most affected. Nine of its 13 sources are critical, and two more, Vaturu Dam and Lower Nadrou, are approaching critical. Only Nasivi and Matovo remain at normal, and eight of the region's nine treatment systems are not at normal, and 18,700 people are affected. The largest numbers are in Saru, Varaqe Supply Area of Lautoka, with 7,800 people, and in Southern Nadi with 6,000 people.

I wish to draw the House's particular attention to Vaturu Dam. Vaturu feeds the Nagado Water Treatment Plant, which supplies all of Nadi and about 70 percent of Lautoka with some 223,000 people.

On 1st November, the Dam stood at 522.4 metres, 41 centimetres above its critical level of 522 metres. It is falling by about 5.3 centimetres a day, and on the current trend, it will drop below the critical level around 8th to 9th November. Level 1 restrictions have been in force at Vaturu since 26th September. Under the worst-case scenario, which the Dam is now tracking, the Dam could fall to about 46 percent full by late December. I will return to the stage message for Vaturu when I speak about the way forward.

For the Northern region, it is in a serious position. Seven of its 16 sources are critical, and five more are approaching critical. Ten of its 11 treatment systems are not at normal. Production is 19.9 million litres a day against the requirement of 29 million litres a day, a shortfall of 32 percent. Sir, 3,500 people are affected – 2,075 in Labasa and Benau supply area, 1,200 in the Taganikula and Vunika area, and 185 in Southern Taveuni. The Taganikula source is down to 8 percent of its normal flow and Bucalevu source in Taveuni has effectively failed. Taveuni as a whole is about 66 percent short. Labasa's 59,000 people are increasingly relying on Nasealevu source as Navau and Nasarava normally provide about 75 percent of Labasa's raw water decline. Nasealevu itself fell from 11million litres to 8.31 million litres a day in the past week.

For the Central-Eastern Region, it is in a better position, but of course not improving. Twelve of its 15 sources remain at normal, and the Rewa River at Waila is still flowing well above need. Three sources are now critical. The most significant is the Savura Cascade, which feeds the Tamavua Water Treatment Plant, serving about 94,000 people in greater Suva. Its flow has fallen from 25 million litres to 19 million litres a day as gauged on 1st November, below its minimum 20 million litres a day. Tamavua is at about 5.7 percent short. The Savura cascade joins Waila, which supplies Vunidawa, and Totogo in Levuka, where dam levels are depleted. There are 2,270 people are affected in the region which include:

- 2,000 in Tamavua supply area;
- 200 in Levuka;
- 43 in Navua; and
- 33 in Vunidawa.

Nine of the region's 11 systems are not at normal and five of them at Waila, Naboro, Nayagi, Deuba, and Namau are growing above the maximum extraction to keep up with the demand. On the other islands, the groundwater sources on Rotuma, Vanuabalavu and Lakeba are more resilient, however, they are expected to fall close to critical if the dry weather persists. Kadavu, which relies on surface water, is expected to stress earliest.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in terms of the Water Authority of Fiji's role in national coordination, a drought is a slow onset disaster. It does arrive overnight like a cyclone, and that is precisely why it must be measured carefully and escalated early. The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) is the eyes and ears of the national system on public water supply.

The WAF has updated the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO) on the status of all these water systems. Its regional reports cover source flows based on 1 November, the supply and production of each system customers affected water carting and scoring against two indicators of the National Drought Plan, source stress and service continuity. The scoring works system by system which includes 5, where flow is declining abnormally at a source serving more than 20 percent of customers with less than 60 days of supply; 0, where critical or near falling source serves at least 20 percent of customers with less than 30 days of normal supply; and 15, where critical or failed sources serve at least 30 percent of customers with less than 14 days' supply. A regional score between 60 and 100 percent places that region in the crisis response band. With this assessment and results, the:

- Northern region - 77.8 percent, we are looking at a crisis response;

- Western region - 76 percent, also a crisis response; and
- Central Eastern region - 42 percent, which is early action response.

On that basis, the WAF has sought the announcement of national response efforts, activation of national coordination and response measures for the Northern and Western regions, and for the Central and Eastern regions release of the pre-agreed early actions under WAF's contingency plan, together with public appeal to conserve water.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the response is a whole-of-Government effort. We are in close liaison with NDRMO, and each agency has a clear role. The Ministry for Rural and Maritime Development, NDRMO and Commissioner's Offices coordinate the overall response with the line Ministry, WAF and Government Shipping Services. The Commissioners Offices assess needs on the ground and arrange and fund budgets, hire water tanks and related items, together with WAF.

The WAF supplies water, carting, filling equipment, pumps and hoses, et cetera. Government Shipping Services working with the WAF moves water to our outer islands. The Rural Water Unit, covering 14 Provinces, supports rural schemes and as reported, affected areas in all regions. Reporting is currently done weekly. Any school or health facility at risk is escalated urgently and carting is on standby.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the WAF now is in phase two of its four-phase drought contingency plan. Let me set out for the House what that means on the ground. There are 67 water carts currently operating by road. More than $255,000 has been committed to carting in the current week alone. Since 30th October, over 885,000 litres of water have been carted by road.

In the Central Division, trucks are serving intermittent supply areas at Sakoca, Colo-i-Suva, rural and emergency deliveries at Verata, Waidalice, Bukuya and Naivurevure in Tailevu. In the West, the trucks are serving rural communities and intermittent supply areas in Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki.

In the Northern Division, trucks are serving rural communities in Labasa, Seaqaqa, Nabouwalu, Savusavu, Taveuni and intermittent supply areas in Labasa, Seaqaqa and Taveuni.

Mr. Speaker, under the WAF's Environmental and Social Management System, schools, health facilities, elderly persons with disabilities and women and children are served first in every rotation ahead of general residential and commercial demand.

Our maritime communities have not been forgotten. Working with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, NDRMO, Commissioners Offices and Government Shipping Services, WAF has carted water by sea to six maritime areas. Between 30th September and 30th October, five trips to the Yasawa Group and Malolo, delivered 810,000 litres of water to Yasawa-i-Rara, Nacula District, Malakati, Navotua, Malolo, Yanuya, Tavua and Mana Island. The sixth trip carrying 150,000 litres is underway from 31st October to 7th November. After leaving Yaqeta, the team supplied Bukama. Three attempts to berth at Teci were unsuccessful because of unfavourable conditions. As at the latest update, the team was carting water in Nasomolevu Catholic school.

One trip each has been completed to Vatulele and to Batiki. Yanuca Island is included in the carting response and the delivery plan for Cikobia was diverted to Udu.

Keeping systems running. Carting is the only part of the response. The WAF has installed temporary pumps, coffer dams and temporary intakes to draw every available litre. At the Nagado Plant, aeration and chlorine pre-dosing are in place and water quality testing has been stepped up because low

dam levels bring a higher risk of algae, iron and manganese.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank the staff of WAF, many of whom are working long hours at sea and on the road, to keep water reaching our people. I also thank the Government Shipping Services, Commissioners Offices, NDRMO and our communities for their patience and cooperation.

Sir, Government must plan for the dry weather to continue. The WAF's projection, built on the Fiji Meteorological Services' Very Dry Outlook is sobering. If dry conditions continue, the share of our 44 sources at critical will rise from 43 percent today to 59 percent in the second half of November, 75 percent by end of November and 82 percent by January 2027. By January, only two sources nationally, Matovo in Sigatoka and Natua in Seaqaqa, are projected to remain at normal, if El Nino continues.

By region, the projection is 11 of 13 Western sources to be critical by end of November; 12 of 16 Northern sources by late November and 15 by January; and in the Central/Eastern region, 6 by late November and 10 or 15 by January.

The staged measures at Vaturu Dam. Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 223,000 people of Nadi and Lautoka who depend on Vaturu, the Water Authority has a stage plan triggered by the dam level.

- Level 1 in force since 26th September, rural offtakes in Nadi and Lautoka are throttled between 9.00 p.m. and 4.00 a.m. Aeration and chlorine pre-dosing are in place at Nagado. Trunk main pressure is checked weekly, and the first public advisory has been issued.
- Level 2, from about 8th to 9th November on the current trend. Plant output is reduced to 92 million to 93 million litres a day. A second advisory will ask the public to limit car washing and will ask hotels and resorts to conserve water. Nadi reservoir outlets will be reduced and further off-takes in Lautoka, including Tolesia and Tavakubu, will be managed with closer control of leakage and losses.
- Level 3, from late November, under the worst case, a third advisory. Night rationing between 9.00 p.m. and 4.00 a.m. Tankers and a mobile package plant, alternative sources of water carting and close monitoring of water quality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, WAF has prepared a stage special operation to carry the national response through to April 2027. It comprises:

- 43 additional water cart trucks;
- 6 package treatment plants - 4 portable units and 2 reverse osmosis units; and
- 10-area maritime response, with 10 vessels, 3 technicians on each vessel working around the clock and, at least, 10 supply trips per vessel, supported by FJD200,000 of carting equipment, including hydrant hoses and pumps.

The maritime response needs 30 technicians. The WAF has 17 in its establishment today and the gap is being met by redeploying staff.

The indicative cost of the special operation is FJD10.4 million in two stages, FJD5.42 million in stage 1 and FJD5 million in stage 2, plus approximately FJD6 million in operating costs above the existing budget. Further discussions are currently being held with the Ministry of Finance in relation to this. The stage 2 terms will be reassessed against the November outlook, and deployment will be reviewed monthly against the Fiji Meteorological Services outlook so that the public money is spent only when the drought requires it. I wish to assure the House that the WAF's ordinary preparedness works remain separately funded and will be delivered regardless of this request.

Going forward, the rural and maritime response will continue to be coordinated through NDRMO, with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Commissioners Offices and Government Shipping Services. Schools, health facilities and vulnerable groups will continue to be served first. The WAF will continue to supply water, carting equipment and technicians, and will keep reporting weekly so that every decision is based on the latest data.

The National Water Conservation and Public Awareness Campaign for restrictions on the non-essential use of water is underway, and the support of the House and all honourable Members is requested. The Government and WAF cannot make it rain, but every litre saved today is a litre that stays in our dams and rivers for the weeks ahead. I, therefore, appeal to every household, business, school, community, and to all honourable Members of the House to play their part:

- use water only for sensible needs;
- avoid washing cars and watering gardens;
- fix leaking taps, toilets and pipes and report any leaks of burst mains to the WAF;
- store drinking water safely and keep containers covered; and
- in the West, hotels, resorts and businesses are asked to lead by example in conserving water.

I also ask the people in areas of intermittent supply or carting to bear with us. Our teams are working to reach everyone, and they will always reach our schools, health facilities and our vulnerable people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to sum up, as of 1st November, 2026, 19 of our 44 water sources are critical and about 24,600 people are affected. The Northern and Western regions have reached crisis response, with the Central Region at an early action. The Vaturu Dam which supplies Nadi and most of Lautoka is expected to fall below its critical level around mid-November. Sixty-seven trucks are carting water around the country and 810,000 litres have been delivered by sea. So, I thank the Fiji Meteorological Services, NDRMO and various stakeholders for the current work they conducted.

Again, I urge all Fijians for their dedication and resilience as we move forward as a nation in unity to face the *El Nino* challenge in front of us. In times of adversity such as cyclones, COVID-19 and now *El Nino*, let us, as a nation, face those challenges together, and work together to overcome it.

Before I end, Government is also actively working with our various development partners on the situation in terms of groundwater service and expanded borehole networks, rainwater harvesting from intermittent rain, water recycling options and mobile desalination plants via ships.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for giving the update on the *El Nino* and Fiji's water security situation that currently we face in this country - one of the biggest challenges that we do face. The strength of this *El Nino*, as the Minister has pointed out, its peak is going to happen towards the end of this year and the impact of that will not only be for the first part of next year but agriculturally, will go right into the middle of next year, so the impacts of it are widespread. He has outlined the contingency plans that they have to address that.

One of the things that we did, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we were talking about the budget, we raised the issue that *El Nino* was going to have an impact on the water situation in this country, and honourable Vijay Nath had suggested amending the budget at that time to make more money available for this because we knew this was going to happen and we knew it in advance.

I am glad to hear what the honourable Minister is pointing out, all the different plans that they have, the various scenarios, all our water system now, our sources are under threat. We already have a fragile system because we have 47 percent of our water is non-revenue water; it leaks. I think what we

need to do, as has been pointed out, all of us need to work hand-in-hand to address these issues. The leakage is not something that can happen overnight but the usage of water.

The honourable Minister has talked about the reverse osmosis, water cut and so forth. One of the things that we do not happen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think back in 2015 when we had something similar, within the first few months, we had the budget for water carting ran out – 30,000 to 60,000 people were affected by that. I know that all of the government agencies will be working hand-in-hand. But we knew this was going to happen and we know that we have contingency plans in place. The thing is incumbent upon us. I do not think this message has gone strongly out throughout the country so far so that people know the importance of this

When the Special Committee was in Labasa, as we went around the North, there were so many fires taking place. We went from Labasa to Savusavu, we had to stop in Seaqaqa because of the fires; fires everywhere because of lack of water. Went back, the same thing. I think the honourable Minister has outlined all of those things that we need to do. For the islands, I think we might have to also consider, I do not know whether we have mobile desalination plants that are powered by solar systems, whether they have the impact to do that because if you are water-carting on boats, it is costing you fuel also.

The reverse osmosis, the 4x4 tanks, all the other things that have been mentioned, but it is incumbent upon everyone in this country to take note and all of us need to be able to conserve the water. I think the message has not gone out strongly enough. I am not too sure, I think we talk about all different kinds of crisis of Fiji, this water issue has not gone strongly out enough, and I think for us also in Parliament, we need to see how we can set an example also in terms of water conservation and how we use water. That will be a much more powerful message because this is going to be something, as has been pointed out by the honourable Minister, towards the end of this year to next year will be the impact on us.

However, when you talk about agriculture, the impact will go on into the middle of next year, and all of that will have an impact on our economy. I think Government will have to pull money from other projects towards this, all of us need to work hand-in-hand. I salute the people of Water Authority of Fiji, the Commissioners, District Officers, Provincial Administrators, *Mata ni Tikina, Turaga ni Koro* will have a very important task to do. Over and above that is public health issues that arise out of lack of water and lack of access to clean and safe toilet. So, I think all of us need to work together. And to those that are on the front line, we are right behind you. We hope that you will be able to deliver this to provide good, clean water for the people of this country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Ministerial Statements, and it is also an appropriate time for us to suspend the proceedings for morning tea break. Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.23 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.26 a.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Dual Citizenship Eligibility to Operate a Taxi Business in Fiji (Question No. 262/2026)

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

> Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament whether a person holding dual citizenship is legally eligible to operate a taxi business in Fiji, provided they hold a valid taxi permit, and what legal provision governs such eligibility?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The eligibility of an individual to hold and operate a taxi permit in Fiji is governed by the Land Transport (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations 2000, as amended. Under Regulation 71(a) and (b), a taxi permit issued to an individual is subject to the condition that the permit holder must be:

(1) A Fijian citizen.
(2) A person who ordinarily resides in Fiji.

The Regulations further define "ordinarily residing in Fiji" as being physically present and living in Fiji for an aggregate period of not less than six months within any 12-month period. Just to repeat that, further define "ordinarily residing in Fiji" as being physically present and living in Fiji for an aggregate period of not less than six months within any 12-month period.

In addition, the Citizenship Act 2009 provides that citizenship may be acquired by birth, registration or naturalisation and accordingly, a person who holds dual citizenship remains eligible to hold a taxi permit, provided that they continue to be a citizen of Fiji and satisfy the residency requirements prescribed under law. The critical issue is not dual citizenship itself; the determinant factors are whether the permit holder is a Fijian citizen and whether the person ordinarily resides in Fiji for an aggregate period of less than six months within any 12-month period. The policy intent behind this provision is to ensure that public service vehicle permits are held and actively managed by individuals who are present in Fiji, accountable to the local regulatory framework, and are able to provide effective oversight of the transport services operating under their permits.

Furthermore, where a permit holder subsequently migrates overseas or no longer satisfies the requirement of "ordinarily residing in Fiji", the Authority may review the permit holders' eligibility and take the necessary regulatory action in accordance with the law. The Authority will continue to strengthen its monitoring and compliance measures to ensure eligible persons continue to benefit from public service vehicle permits and provide the required services to the public.

In summary, dual citizenship does not automatically disqualify a person from holding a taxi permit. However, permit holders must satisfy the citizenship and residency requirements, as I have already described.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now invite supplementary questions.

HON. F.S KOYA.- Honourable Minister, with respect to the regulations, you say that a person has to ordinarily reside in a 12-month period for six months in terms of aggregate. How is that monitored

through the Ministry of Immigration, or is there a monitoring system in the Regulations?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot answer that exactly, but I would assume that, just like any permit, it would be under the monitoring system of the LTA. In terms of all the permits issued, there is a system in place to monitor them. Of course, this would involve liaising with the Authority which holds the data of those who are moving in and out of Fiji. There would be cross-checks between the LTA and those who are residents in Fiji and whether they continue, or do not continue, to satisfy the requirements, as I have already mentioned, but I did not include them, and that is my assumption. That would involve comparing the databases, as well as the inward and outward movement of citizens and residents.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is more related to ensuring that the regulations made by LTA needs to be in line with what the Investment Fiji Act 2022 states. I can already see it in conflict with the Investment Fiji Act 2022. Will the honourable Minister look into the Regulations to ensure that it meets the Investment Fiji Act requirements?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, definitely. In any legislative amendment or regulation, the responsibility of the responsible body is to consult and ensure that whatever legislation or regulation is being applied or is applicable, is consistent with other legislation or regulations that exist, and that there is no inconsistency. I note that, and we will definitely check on that.

Tourism Investment Projects and Implementation Progress
(Question No. 263/2026)

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

> Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the Ministry's work with Investment Fiji to advance tourism investment projects towards implementation?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry works with Investment Fiji to secure investors for tourism projects and to obtain data, such as the figures I will share today, for policy development and other matters relevant to the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Investment Fiji's latest Tourism Investment Project Report records 57 tourism investment projects. They cover accommodation, cultural-based activities and experience-based activities, and the whole value of this is $2.085 billion and in that, are 5,613 rooms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the projects are at three stages. Nineteen projects are under construction with 1,460 rooms, valued at $322 million. Twenty-six projects are in pre-development with 2,476 rooms and $1.3 billion investment; and 12 projects are at conceptual stage, with 1,677 rooms and $443 million in investment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the largest share sits in pre-development. These 26 projects carry about 63 percent of total investment value and 44 percent of expected rooms. Moving them into construction is the next step towards implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a project in the pipeline is not, by itself, an economic thought outcome, but what matters is whether the project proceeds, whether the capital is actually deployed, whether the jobs are created and sustained, and whether the local supply chains benefit. That is the task these 57 projects must meet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in June this year, I shared with the Australasian Hotel Industry Conference and Exhibition (AHICE) Fiji Investment and Tourism Summit in Nadi that Fiji needs an estimated 4,000 new hotel rooms. The pipeline before the house holds 5,613 expected rooms, of which 1,460 are projects already under construction.

Where are these projects? Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 19 projects in Nadi and the other 38 projects are spread across 18 locations. In Western Viti Levu, there are 30 projects in total – 19 in Nadi, five in Sigatoka, three in Rakiraki, two in Lautoka and one in Momi Bay. On the islands of Western Viti Levu, there are 10 projects – four in the Mamanuca, three in the Yasawa Group and one each on Vomo Island, Bekana Island and Vatulele Island. In Suva and Pacific Harbour, there are six projects – three in each. In Vanua Levu, Taveuni and nearby islands, there are seven projects – two in Labasa, two in Taveuni, one each in Savusavu, Qamea and Namena Island. There are four projects on Koro Island and Lau – three on Koro Island and one in Lau.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the 57 projects, 37 are foreign direct investment and 20 are domestic direct investment. We are also following up on 49 tourism investments leads - 35 in accommodation, hotel management and hospitality; five in accessibility and infrastructure; three in host community tourism; three in tours; two in attractions and activities; and one in eco-tourism.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question; out of the 26 projects in the pre-development stage, what is the Ministry and Investment Fiji doing to move them into construction?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated, these 26 projects carry about 63 percent of the pipeline's value every hour implementation is decided. The Ministry works with Investment Fiji where there is a need to secure investors. Investments also work through approvals, infrastructure, utilities, land and regulatory requirements, and aftercare by Investment Fiji helps identify these bottlenecks early. It is getting better, Sir, in terms of clearing all the requirements to put a project to be ready for development.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is in twofold relative to the Kerzner International's One&Only in the Yasawas and Vatulele. Has One&Only in the Yasawas commenced construction? The issues surrounding Vatulele, have they been resolved?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, One&Only would be on the ready to go category. I believe all the requirements have been met, and they are ready to go. We are also looking at building an airport in Yasawas, to help properties, like One&Only, develop in there. There are other interests also in the Yasawa Group. Yasawa would one day become the Maldives of Fiji. That is the kind of vision we have for the Yasawa Group. Regarding Vatulele, the commitment is there, it will happen, however, there are a few issues to be resolved. The developer is committed to seeing Vatulele materialise.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, my question to the honourable Minister is, what steps are being taken to attract tourism-related projects in rural and maritime areas, and how many such new projects have commenced in rural and maritime areas?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, by its nature, tourism is a rural-based industry, so most of these developments are in the rural areas. When you visit Rakiraki today, you will be amazed at what is happening there. Rakiraki, over the next couple of years, will be another Denarau and these are all in the rural areas - Duadua, Volivoli and the old Wananavu, now fully developed to be a five-star hotel, so these are all rural based. Koro and Vanua Levu are also developing. The Lau Group is also coming up; however, the challenge is connectivity. We are looking at upgrading the airports to make that happen

but all in all, it is mostly the rural and maritime areas.

Looking at these figures, when we had the National Economic Summit at the beginning of our administration, I was part of a panel and I said, "The measure of an accomplishment of an administration is the building of one five-star resort - Sheraton at one time, Sofitel Fiji Resort and Outrigger Resort. What we have now in our administration is much, much more than one.

As I speak, there are about seven major projects that are ready or near completion. If you go to the Western Division today, you can see it happening. If you drive through Denarau, they are clearing up lots of areas there for development. The future looks good. As I have said, there are 57 today. Also in the works, there are another 47, so going forward, we could be looking at close to 80 projects or 90 projects in tourism over the coming years and it is uplifting the economy right now.

When I see figures about the growth of the economy, I sometimes question some of those figures because of the number of visitors that are coming into Fiji which will reach more than a million this year; and investments that are happening on the ground. So, tourism is driving a lot of this and the way it is developing going forward, it will continue to be the mainstay of our business. Let us not forget, tourism is mostly centered in Ba, Nadroga and Navosa, right now which is approximately 75 percent, and is expected to grow outside of that area and uplift the economy in a bigger way.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the honourable Minister has just mentioned tourism in Fiji but you will be amazed that yesterday's flight from San Francisco to Fiji was half empty, honourable Minister, and, of course, the LA flight too which arrived at 5.30 a.m. but was not full at all. So, you have to be careful in how you play your cards. My questions to honourable Minister:

(a) how many tourism projects on the list are currently delayed?
(b) what are the principal reasons for the delay?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I apologise, I have a problem understanding the honourable Member.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nath, can you speak a bit slow and clearer?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker Sir, we are aware of the number of projects that are currently delayed. I would like to know the principal reasons for the delay?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I suppose you are referring to one particular project right now, but it will be open in the first quarter of next year. I believe you are referring to one particular project, the FNPF one, and that will now be open in the first quarter of next year, and the branding is going to go up another star. It will become JW Marriott. JW Marriott would be at the top of the Marriott range of brands. JW is a significant accomplishment for Fiji. You can have a normal Marriott, you can have others, Renaissance and all that but when you become a JW, it tells the whole world that this country has reached another level. That delayed project will become a JW now. So, yes, we are disappointed in the way it has not reopened, but when it reopens, it will put Fiji at another level.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, with your indulgence, I would like to move the eighth Oral Question forward for some urgent reason. If it is all right with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce and Business Development, I would like to do that now. Deputy Prime Minister, with your indulgence, I would now invite honourable Jovesa Vocea to ask Question No. 269/2026.

Fiji Innovation Hub: Driving MSME and Startup Growth
(Question No. 269/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on the establishment of the Fiji Innovation Hub and activities that have been carried out to drive innovation, productivity, market access and business growth among MSMEs and startups?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, to do justice to this question, I would like to step back a bit and just explain to the House and the people of Fiji what has been happening in the MSME space.

Mr. Speaker, when we got into Government, we decided that to really address economic diversification in Fiji, there need to be a concerted lift in the development of the MSME sector, and likewise the cooperative sector. And I am happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that from this side of the House, when we talk about our national agenda, those two subjects fall front and centre in what we have been doing to diversify the Fijian economy.

In that ambition, Mr. Speaker, when we started, we decided to, one of the things that we realised, or certainly those of us who got into Government realised, very little strategic planning was happening in this critical area. So, we got going with a strategic plan, which is being tabled, and we shared that in this House. The Innovation Hub, Sir, is one of the outcomes of that MSME strategic plan from 2026 to 2031.

In terms of what the Fiji Innovation Hub is, it was established in July 2025, spearheaded by the Reserve Bank of Fiji with our Ministry. Also, there was assistance from the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) through the Pacific Digital Economy Programme, UNDP, and the European Union, as well as the governments of Australia, New Zealand, and a start-up lead accelerator called Creative HQ, based in Wellington, New Zealand.

To understand or appreciate what an Innovation Hub does, Mr. Speaker, larger economies, or some economies right now, have started investing in tech hubs. So, all the innovative ideas from our young entrepreneurs, boys and girls, they send them to these tech hubs and then try and help them to scale up their digital solutions. New Zealand has particularly been successful through their innovation hub. You will recall an accounting software called Xero. It is worth, I believe, NZ$3 million. That started from a innovation hub. So, what I am talking about is developing potential that can potentially create economic opportunity for our young and really expand Fiji's economy certainly in terms of digital innovation.

We launched the programme in late 2025, as I mentioned, and in February 2026, the hub hosted its first hackathon bringing together 13 teams and in an intensive 36-hour innovation sprint. Participants developed solutions under three key themes:

(1) Financial technology;
(2) Sustainability; and
(3) Ease of doing business.

The event attracted individuals from across the country, and we are talking about young men and women. Participants from Lautoka, Nadi, Navua, Tailevu as well as international participation from some of our young diaspora in Perth, demonstrating the growing interest in our very early

stages of innovation landscape.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on that momentum, the hub launched a 12-week Activator Programme in April 2026, providing tailored mentorship, technical support and business development guidance to nine promising startups. These ventures are developing innovative solutions ranging from fractional investment platforms and open banking applications for financial cooperatives, this is an interesting one, Mr. Speaker, digital bookkeeping tools for market vendors, national card switch solutions, digital financial literacy and payments platforms for children and what could become Fiji's first peer-to-peer lending programme. I thought I just focus a little bit on the digital bookkeeping tool as well as the digital financial literacy and payments platform for children, because they are quite innovative.

What the digital bookkeeping tools for market vendors will do, hopefully, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is allow our market vendors to start recording their financial activity. As a first stage to becoming a formal business, we all know that if we provide an easy way for them to start recording, it is an easy segway from moving into the formal part of the economy. From market vendors using financial tools, they can go perhaps to a lending institution eventually and try and scale up. That is, sort of, what is happening here in this space.

Secondly, with the digital financial literacy and payments platforms, I am hoping the honourable Minister for Education will at one time come and see this initiative. It is an attempt to educate all our children in terms of financial literacy. The disciplines of saving, investment, budgeting, et cetera, all from ideas born by young men and women in Fiji. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are just two examples of what is emanating from this innovation hub.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in May 2026, Fiji hosted the Inaugural Startup World Cup Competition at the InterContinental in Denarau; eight startups competed for the opportunity to showcase their innovations on the international stage. The first runner-up secured a place at the Asia Finale Regional finals in Hong Kong this past September, while the winning team earned the opportunity to represent Fiji at the global finals in Silicon Valley this week. This achievement, Mr. Speaker, again marks an important milestone in positioning Fiji startups within the global innovation ecosystem and connecting our local entrepreneurs to international networks, investors and opportunities.

The Fiji innovation hub, Mr. Speaker, has established a structured year-round platform that provides startups with consistent support, mentorship and pathways for growth. Its programmes are specifically designed to nurture high potential innovations capable of addressing market gaps, enhancing service delivery and improving convenience and creating new opportunities within Fiji's broader financial and digital ecosystem.

Just very briefly, I know I am running out of time, importantly, this process is supported through the Reserve Bank of Fiji through its regulatory sandbox. This enables innovators to test and refine their products in a controlled environment, ensuring proper safeguards for entrepreneurs and investors, partners and end users by piloting solutions, gathering feedback and strengthening business models before entering licensing stage, the hub is creating a more robust and sustainable innovation pipeline for Fiji. Putting this into perspective, Mr. Speaker, between the launch of the regulatory sandbox in 2019 and 2025, only four solutions were tested, one at a time.

Today, there are 12 innovative solutions in the sandbox pipeline, nine of which have come directly from the hub. All nine activator startups are expected to progress through the sandbox stage, five have entered stage one - preliminary assessment; three have advanced to stage two – preparation; and one has reached stage three - experimentation and testing.

Mr. Speaker, I will end there because in the interest of time, suffice to say, that what this side of the House has created through this innovative innovation hub is some major potential in terms of our country, in terms of our digital inspirations and more importantly, creating an avenue for our young to actually be innovative and create income and employment for themselves and others by doing what they are doing. Mr. Speaker, I hope that provides some useful information in terms of what is being done through Fiji's innovation hub and its activities.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are there any supplementary questions?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Who funds the innovation hub and what is the cost of operating this innovation hub on a yearly basis?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, it is several actors who acting together. So, the Reserve Bank is providing funding as well as development partners, New Zealand and Australia, they there are providing quite significant amount of money, as well as some funding from the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development. In fact, it costs a couple of millions to run a year and that is the way we have structured it at the moment. Obviously, we need to make it sustainable.

Hopefully, with the success of some of the digital innovations, some of that can be ploughed back, to sort of, self-fund the tech hub going forward, but it is an initial start, it is very exciting from what I can see. I hope for some of you in this House to see what our young men and women are doing, because as I told them the last time I went to launch the hub, if this is what we are seeing in our country, our country is in very good hands.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vocea, you are granted leave for a necessary medical treatment and rest.

Now, we go back with heightened anticipation to the third Oral Question to be asked by honourable Hem Chand.

Addressing and Preventing Bullying in Schools
(Question No. 264/2026)

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

> Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on what are the Ministry's plans to address bullying cases in schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education maintains a zero-tolerance approach towards bullying and is committed to strengthening measures to prevent such incidents in school. We have the policies established that guide schools in preventing, reporting and managing bullying incidents. These policies, namely the Student Code of Conduct, the Behaviour Management Policy, the Child Protection Policy, the Counselling Policy and Drugs and Substance Abuse Policy, provide guidance to Heads of Schools and teachers on student behaviour, child safeguarding, appropriate interventions and disciplinary action.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when a bullying incident occurs in schools, the Head of School is responsible for ensuring that the matter is addressed promptly and appropriately, which includes receiving a complaint, establishing the facts, ensuring the immediate safety of the affected student, involving parents and guardians where appropriate, providing counselling and support, and applying suitable, corrective or disciplinary measures in accordance with the Ministry of Education policy.

Serious incidents involving physical assault, abuse or threats to students, safety must be reported promptly to the Ministry of Education and referred to the relevant authorities, including the Fiji Police Force, where necessary. Students affected by bullying are receiving appropriate protection and support, while students responsible for bullying are also held accountable through fair and appropriate procedures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry recognises that prevention requires more than just disciplinary action, and we continue to emphasise the positive behaviour, respect, empathy, clear responsibility and peaceful conflict resolution through school-based awareness activities, guidance, counselling and engagement with parents and school communities. The Ministry also works very closely with the relevant stakeholders, including the Fiji Police Force and the Substance Abuse Advisory Council, where specialised support and interventions are required.

I want to assure this august House, that the Ministry will continue to strengthen, review, implement and monitor its existing policies to improve awareness among Heads of School, teachers, students and parents and reinforce the requirement of timely reporting of bullying incidents. We will continue to also work with relevant agencies to strengthen counselling, early intervention and appropriate disciplinary actions. As I speak, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also urge all the Heads of Schools not to conceal or delay reporting of serious incidents in schools, as timely information will enable the Ministry to intervene and protect students effectively.

To addressing bullying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a shared responsibility. While the Ministry of Education will continue to provide policy direction, guidance and oversight, parents, teachers, school management, students and community members must work together to create a safe and respectful learning environment. Our objective, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not to stop bullying when it occurs but also to prevent it from happening and ensure that every child can attend school without fear, so we can allow them to reach their full potential.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recent bullying case at QVS is quite alarming where Year 13 students bullied Year 11 students, if I am not wrong – 37 students were bullied by Year 13 students. More alarming is that the matter was brought to the attention of the Ministry of Education by parents, when this matter should have been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Education by the Head of School. This exposes that monitoring and reporting is poor.

My question is, what is the Ministry doing? You have mentioned about policies in place, but in this case, reporting was not done by the Head of School. What is the Ministry doing to ensure that it strengthens its monitoring and reporting so that incidents of this nature can be brought to the attention of the Ministry of Education at the earliest?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- As I have already alluded to, any incident that happened in school, is usually dealt with by the Head of School. So appropriate processes and procedures were followed according to the policies that I have highlighted. I think the only discrepancy noted was the untimely reporting to the Ministry. But they have all attended to the case, of following the policies and procedures highlighted in the policy.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Policies need to evolve with time. What we have seen with QVS and other schools, bullying is prevalent. My question to you is, will the Ministry consider an independent and confidential reporting mechanism for students who are being bullied to report directly to the Ministry, so that there is no retaliation from the school or from other students? They can be bullied twice if they report and if it is not confidential, and if the students come to know that the child has reported, then they will be bullied again, or even the school will feel offended. Can we have a confidential mechanism for the students to report directly, so that such cases can be nipped

in the bud?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- As I have also mentioned, we are trying to review the existing policies to address exactly what the honourable Member has highlighted, to ensure that we continue to provide our students a safe teaching and learning environment.

HON. V. NATH.- We understand there were many cases which have been reported, but this one is alarming, the one that you are talking about today. It was brought to my attention as well during our field trips. Would you be able to inform Parliament the total number of bullying cases reported to the Ministry this year? If possible, break down between primary and secondary schools?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nath, you are totally deviating from the question. You are asking for data, statistics?

HON. V. NATH.- Probably, yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he can provide this data next time, because I understand there are many cases which are alarming. We have seen a number of students being bullied. In fact, some Heads of Schools do not complain, knowing that they may be victimised, as alluded by honourable Kumar. We would just like to know, probably in future, if this data can be provided?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Koya, were you going to supplement your colleague's question?

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am neighbourly but not that neighbourly, Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, if I may, just give a quick background and this could be helpful to everyone. In Northern Ireland it became such a serious problem that they turned this into an Act which was basically addressing the bullying in schools. Anyone who was a former school or teacher here will understand. My question to you, honourable Minister, we have a serious problem in Fijian schools with respect to bullying, it is actually very, very grave.

Leaving it to policy is okay for the time being but are you looking at eventually putting in an Act which then governs the boards, councils or the schools that are grant-aided or whichever way you want to work out, so that there is a guideline which constantly changes. So, when you turn it into an Act, like they have done in Northern Ireland with respect to bullying specifically in schools, there is a proper way to do that so that every school has something to work of.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- We are currently reviewing the existing policy and that will also assist us to determine the way forward. We are also thinking of establishing a National School Safety and Anti-Bullying Steering Committee. That is something that we would like to explore and also try to have a timely reporting in terms of schools to provide a report on a periodic basis. So, these are some of the things that we would like to explore to mitigate and address these issues on a timely manner. We will not rule out your suggestion.

MR. SPEAKER.- I was just going to comment since it involved my old school. One of the issues, I think that honourable Hem Chand might wish to consider, the delay in the conveyance of the complaint, in sync could very well be that the parents did not report it to the Head of School in the first place. That is a possibility and that is why it could very well be, Minister can correct me on

that. We are all concerned about it and that is why we need to streamline the system for complaints, either through confidentiality, which honourable Kumar has suggested, or through honourable Koya's suggestion from the Northern Ireland experience.

Fiji Pineapple Branding and Marketing Strategy
(Question No. 265/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry and Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand for Fiji Pineapple Branding and Marketing Strategy?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways, Sugar Industry and the Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand. On 28th October, 2026, the Ministry formalised a strategic partnership with the Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand through the signing of the MOU, aimed at positioning Fiji's pineapple industry as a premium, export-orientated and internationally competitive agriculture subsector. This partnership reflects the Government's broader vision of transforming agriculture from a production-focused sector to one that is increasingly market-led, innovation-driven, value-added, and globally connected.

Fiji's pineapple industry continues to demonstrate strong growth potential, underscoring the sector's growing importance within Fiji's non-sugar agriculture economy. The opening of the New Zealand export market is highlighting a significant opportunity to strengthen commercialisation, expand market access and unlock greater economic value from existing production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MOU directly addresses this strategic challenge. Through collaboration, the Ministry and the Pacific Trade Invest (PTI) New Zealand will work to develop a nationally recognised Fiji Pineapple Brand, supported by the comprehensive market research, consumer intelligence, international promotion, trade engagement, and industry capacity development. The partnership will also strengthen capabilities in quality assurance, packaging, branding, export readiness, and commercial market development. This initiative builds upon important milestones already achieved through the 2025 National Agriculture Mini-Trade Forum, the Pineapple Feasibility Report, the Fiji Pineapple Investment Plan, and Fiji's successful commercial trial export of fresh pineapples to New Zealand. Collectively, this initiative has established a strong platform for export expansion and demonstrated Fiji's ability to meet international market standards and consumer expectations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government regards this partnership not merely as a branding exercise, but also a strategic economic intervention designed to enhance value creation across the entire pineapple value chain. Over the three-year implementation period, supported by a joint investment of approximately NZD115,000, the partnership is expected to deliver several tangible outcomes for the industry and the economy. These include establishing a nationally recognised Fiji Pineapple Brand, strengthening market intelligence systems, increasing international promotion, expanding commercial networks, and enhancing export readiness across the sector.

The Ministry further anticipates stronger commercial linkage between farmers, exporters, processors, and international buyers, resulting in increased participation in Fiji pineapple products within the premium, regional, and international markets. The initiative is also expected to encourage greater private sector investment across the pineapple value chain, including production, expansion,

processing, value addition, packaging, logistics, and agro-business innovation. In addition, the programme will support the development of higher-value pineapple products, thereby diversifying income streams and strengthening industry resilience.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will measure this partnership's success by its ability to improve the livelihood of our farmers and rural communities. Through stronger branding, enhanced market access, and premium market positioning, we expect increased commercial returns for producers, greater participation by women and youth in agribusiness, and expanded economic opportunities throughout the pineapple-producing region of Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this initiative is aligned with the National Development Plan, the Agriculture Strategic Development Plan, and the Non-Sugar Agriculture Policy. It supports the Government's objective of building a more diversified, resilient, productive, and export-orientated agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to assure the august House that Cabinet has endorsed the principle of national ownership under this initiative. Accordingly, Fiji Pineapple Brand and all associated intellectual property rights, trademarks, brand identity assets will remain the property of the Government of Fiji. This ensures that the long-term value generated through the national brand remains aligned with Fiji's development priorities and continue to benefit our farmers, exporters, industry stakeholders, and the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Memorandum of Understanding represent a strategic investment in the future of Fiji's agriculture sector and economy, and it is designed to convert production potential into export growth, transform commodities into premium brands and attract investment into rural areas and create sustainable economic opportunities for our people.

Our objective is clear, to strengthen Fiji's presence in the international market, increase export competitiveness, improve return to farmers, stimulate investment and value addition across the pineapple value chain, and establish Fiji as a trusted supplier of premium tropical products. Through partnerships such as this, Government is laying the foundation for a more competitive, resilient and prosperous agriculture sector that contributes meaningfully to national economic growth and sustainable rural development.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are there any supplementary questions?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is, obviously, very commendable that we have got this Memorandum of Understanding with the Pacific Trade Invest New Zealand. What concerns me though is that we have a product, probably one of the best in the world. We have some of the sweetest pineapples and bananas in the world. We can actually grow that, of course, through getting this development strategy done, but what is missing and what I did not hear from you all, honourable Minister, we have an even better version of the pineapple that can fetch more money for our farmers.

My question to you is, does this include our organic pineapples because that is not gold dust that is diamonds in the actual industry and from an export perspective. If it does not, please ensure that something is done because there is a Fijian organic branding as you know, that will fetch our farmers a whole lot more than just a normal pineapple and its by-products.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the branding includes the organic component of Fiji pineapples.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Honourable Minister, for this initiative demand and supply is very important for it to succeed. So, from the demand side whether you have any confirmed buyers for pineapples and from the supply side, whether we will be able to provide pineapples consistently of

the right quality of the right standard.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of agriculture produce, we normally work from market back to producers. We have had producers in the past, but we have failed to secure markets for them because of requirements in biosecurity and other trade requirements that had been sorted out. We already have a market in New Zealand for the trial shipment that went to New Zealand last year. Unfortunately, we could not supply enough simply because we were going towards the end of the season and now, we are preparing well for this season's crop.

There had been some plans to diversify lands that used to be under sugar cane into pineapple and that had been taken up well in our sugarcane producing area especially in the Ba area. We intend to be exporting to the demand that we currently have for New Zealand. We are now concentrating on the New Zealand market because of our easy access and the demand that we have in the New Zealand
market.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his statement this morning. I want to ask a general question, not only for pineapples. I congratulate you for opening this because I had visited New Zealand for the Seasonal Work Programme and a lot of companies that I visited also import a lot of fruits to distribute, and in them including bananas, pineapples and pawpaws. I have had problems of trying to initiate some movement in that because of biosecurity and other matters. Do you think now that there is opportunity for more tropical fruits to be sold by our farmers to New Zealand?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am so thankful that this had come up when we are now trying to establish a lot of trade and agricultural produce to the New Zealand market. As very well said, requirements in the biosecurity area had restricted a lot of exports of tropical fruits to the New Zealand market. One in particular is bananas that we used to export to the New Zealand market. We had some diseases which are still currently in Fiji, and because New Zealand has a small banana industry, it had always been difficult to export bananas to New Zealand with the current disease status we have in the country. We had tried to import some of the disease-resilient varieties, that should enable us to export disease-free varieties of bananas to the New Zealand market, and work is already being undertaken to see if we can export bananas to the New Zealand market.

There are quite a few other tropical fruits, some of which have very strong biosecurity requirements on fruit flies, which we currently have in Fiji and are not in New Zealand. It has always been an uphill battle when we normally want to influence our partners, biosecurity in New Zealand on how we could export products that are affected with fruit flies in Fiji, and those fruit flies are not in New Zealand, and those still have the biosecurity requirements for us to fulfil. But we do proceed into identifying varieties that do not have those biosecurity requirements that we can pass through to send to the New Zealand market, and we are working with our partners in New Zealand to get those produce across to the New Zealand market.

Addressing Domestic Skills Shortages Through Local Workforce Development
(Question No. 266/2026)

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

In light of increasing outward labour migration and reported skills shortages in key domestic industries, can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations and Justice update Parliament on the

proactive measures being undertaken to develop, retain and mobilise local workers to address these shortages?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you very much for the question today. I rise to address not just a question but a very important national dialogue because it involves priorities. It involves the proactive measures that are being undertaken by the Fijian Government to develop, retain, mobilise our local workforce to address existing and emerging skills gaps that exist across the country.

Mr. Speaker, the development of our workforce is not simply an employment issue, it is a matter of national economic development, social stability, productivity, investment, and long-term prosperity of our people. Fiji's economic success depends significantly on the availability of a skilled, productive, adaptable, and motivated workforce. Whether we are discussing tourism, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, information technology, healthcare, maritime services, infrastructure development, or the public service, the availability of appropriately skilled workers is essential to achieving our national development objectives.

Our Government recognises that Fiji possesses considerable human capital. We have talented young people, experienced professionals, skilled trades people, dedicated public servants, hardworking farmers, capable entrepreneurs, and experienced workers who contribute to our economy every single day. However, we must acknowledge that industries, or certain industries, continue to experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers with appropriate qualifications, technical competencies, and practical experience. These skills can delay projects, increase business cost and affect service delivery, reducing productivity and constrain our economic growth. The challenge before us is, therefore, clear, we must build a workforce that meets the current needs of our economy, while preparing our people for the employment opportunities for the future.

Mr. Speaker, the Fijian Government is committed to addressing this challenge through a coordinated approach that places local workers at the centre of our economic development agenda. The first and most important measure is investing in the development of our people. We cannot sustainably address skills shortages if we do not systematically develop the skills of our own workforce.

Our Government recognises the importance of strengthening technical and vocational education, improving access to practical training, and ensuring that the qualifications obtained by our people correspond with the requirements of the labour market. We understand that not only every young Fijian will pursue a university degree, and a university qualification is not only a pathway to a successful and rewarding career. Our economy requires electricians, plumbers, mechanics, welders, carpenters, heavy equipment operators, construction workers, agricultural technicians, hospitality professionals, information technology specialists, and many other skilled workers. These occupations are fundamental to our national development.

The Government is working with relevant training institutions, including, as we discussed yesterday, the Fiji National University, and other recognised providers to strengthen practical training opportunities and ensure that training programmes respond to actual industry requirements. We must encourage more young people to pursue technical and vocational qualification that leads directly to employment.

Mr. Speaker, technical training programmes are designed around competencies employers require, including practical workplace experience, occupational safety, problem-solving communications, digital literacy, and professional conduct. We must also ensure that vocational training is not viewed as a second-choice pathway. A qualified tradesperson who can build infrastructure, maintain industrial equipment, install electrical systems or operate specialised

machinery make an invaluable contribution to our economy. We must create a culture, Mr. Speaker, in which technical skills are respected, appropriately rewarded, and recognised as essential to Fiji's development.

Training is most effective when it corresponds or responds to actual needs of employers and the wider economy. We must therefore strengthen the relationship between the labour market to information, and the planning of education and training programmes. We need to understand, occupations are experiencing shortages, qualifications required, where those shortages are occurring, and whether the gaps are temporary or likely to continue over the long term. For example, Mr. Speaker, construction industry requires more qualified tradespersons. Training institutions are encouraged to develop appropriate programmes and expand practical training opportunities. We also have on-job training that are being offered by many of the companies to retain Fijian workers.

Mr. Speaker, classroom education alone cannot address every skills shortage. Many occupations require practical experience, workplace exposure, and the opportunity to learn directly from experienced professionals. The Government continues to encourage employers to participate in apprenticeship programmes, structured workplace training, internships, and other recognised work-based learning arrangements.

These programmes allow young people to acquire practical competencies while gaining an understanding of workplace expectations. They also provide employers with an opportunity to develop workers according to their operational requirements. A stronger apprenticeship system can help address the shortages of experienced tradespeople and technicians by creating a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers.

We must also encourage experienced workers approaching retirement to pass on their knowledge to younger employees through mentoring, coaching, and structured skills transfer programme. By combining formal qualifications with practical experience, Fiji is and will be building a workforce that is better prepared to meet the demands of a modern industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must not overlook workers who already possess valuable skills but lack formal qualification. Across Fiji, many workers have acquired considerable practical experience through years of employment, even in formal work, family businesses, farming, construction, mechanical repairs, and other occupations. Where appropriate assessment arrangements are available, we should encourage the recognition of prior learning and existing competencies so that workers can obtain recognised qualifications or certification.

We can improve their employment prospects, support career progression, and help employers identify the skills already available within the local workforce. Furthermore, workforce development must not end when the person completes formal education. Workers must have opportunities to upgrade their skills, acquire new competencies, and adapt to changing occupational demand.

The Government, therefore, recognises the importance of lifelong learning, professional development, and continuous workforce training. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a few more pages but allow me to end by just referring back to what the honourable Deputy Prime Minister had referred to earlier this morning. He spoke about 19 constructions of hotels in the pipeline, a further 20, almost 32, are yet to start construction. However, that would require a lot more than what we have in stock. It requires a lot more construction workers. Interns will be able to be brought online so that they can learn and be offloaded with the necessary skills from those who are already years ahead in the construction industry.

Again, the services that come out of those 19, imagine 19 hotels in the Nadi-Lautoka area. That not only means construction workers, it means that thousands of other workers who are going to be employed in the hospitality industry will also have to be trained.

The support system around those hotels also needs to be taken care of. There is going to be an agricultural upgrade so that landowners, even between Lautoka and Nadi, must now be brought online or on-ramp to look at ways in which their farming could be mechanised so that they themselves can support the hotel industry in terms of food and food security.

I am sure that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we progress on from yesterday's discussion about avenue developing not only just the tertiary aspect of it, but also the vocational aspect of its operation and mandate, we will begin to see a system in our country that has been developed that addresses the paradox I spoke about yesterday. Thousands of graduates coming out from tertiary and schools, thousands of jobs are available, and these two are not meeting. With the national development and strategic planning coming on board, we can have better alignment that better addresses the concerns of the industry.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this country cannot operate without skills. When we speak to the employers, the reason they give is, the locals do not want to work. That is why there are so many foreign workers in the country right now, especially in the building industry.

I just want to ask, knowing that there is a shortage of skilled workers, knowing there is an excuse that locals do not want to work, this is coming from employers, has there been any survey conducted to really find out whether this is true or there is any truth in it, because sometimes the employers also take advantage of the situation. Instead of employing locals, they want to get foreigners. Honourable Minister, has the Ministry of Employment carried out any survey to basically tell us that there is some truth in what the employers are saying? That is my question.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Bala has really put me on the spot. I am just two weeks on the job and I think he knows the answer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there had been a report or study conducted, I am sure I would be happy to share it with honourable Bala. However, such a statement needs to be considered in its context because there are other statements that have been made by employees. Employees are saying we have made ourselves available, but they have gone on to recruit from overseas.

We understand the common language around construction and these industries. The workers who are brought from overseas work longer hours, they work faster, and they work harder. However, we have to find out if that statement is really evidence-based because I am sure that we have a very strong, reliable, and trustworthy workforce locally.

I think if employers are making those statements, they may have their own experience about our local workforce. That does not mean that they are totally not viable to the prospect of them, themselves, carrying the responsibility of developing their own local workforce. It might take a little bit more persuasion; it might take a little bit more time, but I think we have to develop a culture where local employers take on local workforce and make sure that they train them up. They might need a little bit more patience than those they bring in overseas, but we cannot have a situation where we have a growing foreign workforce over and above the preference for a local workforce that is available. That is why I think this alignment process is important because it not only manages the supply, but also the ethics required in the workforce for the economy to grow.

Climate Resilience of Fiji's Health Facilities
(Question No. 267/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the measures being implemented under Fiji's National Adaptation Plan to protect hospitals, health centres and nursing stations vulnerable to rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, cyclones, drought and other climate-related hazards?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the strategic measures being implemented under Fiji's National Health Adaptation Plan to safeguard our vulnerable health care infrastructure against escalating climate-related hazards. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is executing a multi-hazard approach that seamlessly links climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and the continuity of care.

Under the Disaster Management Act of 2024, our objectives extend beyond protecting physical buildings to ensuring that vital health services remain operational during cyclones, storm surges, flooding, and droughts. To direct our finite resources effectively, the Ministry, with the support of the World Health Organization, has developed a national risk profile using strategic tools for assessing risk for staff. This risk-informed baseline allows us to prioritise the facilities facing the highest exposure and potential disruption. Additionally, through the SHAPE programme, KOICA and WHO, we have successfully implemented facility-level vulnerability assessments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 13 of the Fiji National Adaptation Plan outlines four ongoing health actions dedicated to climate-resilient infrastructure design. When any hospital, health centre, or nursing station undergoes repair or rehabilitation, our policy is practical and clear. We build back to a higher standard of resilience rather than restoring previous vulnerabilities. Key physical and operational upgrades currently being implemented and assessed across exposed facilities include:

- site and drainage upgrades;
- resource continuity;
- upgrading to resilient solarised energy systems;
- securing backup power, and ensuring safe water sanitation and health care arrangements;
- medical safeguards;
- protecting critical cold chain capacity;
- equipment and essential medicine storage;
- operational connectivity; and
- restructuring emergency communications and logistics to maintain safe access and seamless pathways during crisis.

Immediate and readiness workforce capacity - In anticipation of the *El Niño* impact and the upcoming cyclone season, the health and nutrition cluster and the WASH cluster, all led by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), have deployed immediate readiness measures. We have pre-positioned medical and WASH kits, heightened our national disease surveillance systems for early detection and buffered essential medicine supplies will last for three months at health facilities and warehouses nationwide.

The infrastructure is only as resilient as the personnel operating it and under the Fiji National Adaptation Plan Action (13.7), they are actively training health workers in disaster medicine and public health surveillance to ensure sound decision-making under emergency conditions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our overarching framework, which is the National Health Emergency and Disaster Management Action Plan, or Health Map, is currently undergoing a comprehensive review to align with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy of 2018-2030.

A vital validation workshop is scheduled for 18th to 19th November this year, bringing together senior managers and humanitarian partners to look into our future operational response mechanism. Climate resilience is an ongoing responsibility, and the Ministry remains fully committed to protecting our frontline healthcare workers, our patients and the health services that every Fijian relies on.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, you mentioned the National Climate Finance Strategy. How many of these vulnerable hospitals and nursing stations are actually fully funded for the upgrades now, and how much is this transformation costing the taxpayer?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Climate Finance Strategy serves as a structural blueprint to align adaptation priorities such as water, sanitation, infrastructure and energy with international climate financing planning. So, it is important to distinguish between the identified priorities and the fully funded projects.

Physical works are strictly sequenced based on ongoing risk assessments, available resources and approved national planning budgets. Rather than placing the entire financial burden on the Fijian taxpayers, we are aggressively leveraging international funding platforms and bilateral partnerships such as our collective work through the Strengthening Health Adaptation Project (SHAP) with WHO to systematically secure external capital for these upgrades.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, as part of these adaptation plans, have you identified some of your facilities that might need to be relocated? For example, the Lomolomo Hospital, the Ravitaki Nursing Station in Kadavu, the Ministry of Agriculture had to give one of their quarters. Is relocation part of this adaptation program for some of your facilities as well?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes relocation is also part of the Health National Adaptation Plan.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I can see as with the National Adaptation Plan, priorities will be given to those projects which are vulnerable to rising sea levels, et cetera. My question is, can you tell us which projects would be left behind if we are giving priority to these ones?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The idea is that no facility and community should be left behind. We are prioritising as we move along, and we are mindful of the fact of competing priorities, not only at a national level, but within the ministry as well. Therefore, as I said, we are utilising the strategic tool for assessing risk (STAR) to develop the national risk profile. It is more like of triaging which facilities to be prioritised based on emergency and which can be done later, which is of immediate need that can be funded within budgetary allocation or which we can ask for assistance from our development partners. Bottom line is, we plan to leave no facility or community behind.

HON. S. KUMAR.- What specific climate-sensitive diseases are currently heightened, currently triggering your heightened surveillance systems and are our current laboratories equipped to handle a sudden outbreak during a disaster such as this El Niño, which Fiji is currently facing?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our plan is not only looking at the infrastructure and those that will be mending those infrastructures; we are looking at climate-

sensitive diseases as well, and how we can be proactive in our approach in ensuring that we have things in position in various, in the four Divisions, so that we can prepare accordingly.

We work in collaboration with the information that is handed out from Fiji CDC on the trends of disease within national, regional, and international levels They give us advice beforehand, and we work accordingly with them so that we are proactive and ready before a disaster happens. So, climate-sensitive diseases such as waterborne diseases and infectious diseases, those are the things we prepare for.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker. Sir, the reason I asked the honourable Minister which projects will be left behind is that I was interested in the progress of the Valelevu Health Centre. If the honourable Minister could please provide an update on that.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, Valelevu Health Centre is part of the PHIT Project. That will be funded through the PHIT Project. We really need to holistically improve the infrastructure. Therefore, it is not a short-term improvement. It will be done well; it will be done right.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will suspend our proceedings for lunch break. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

Fiji's Public Debt and Debt Servicing Obligations
(Question No. 268/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance inform Parliament of Fiji's actual public debt as at 30th September, 2026, compared to the projected $11.7 billion or 79.8 percent of GDP by July 2026, and what proportion of Government revenue is currently being spent on debt servicing?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government remains committed to maintaining transparency in the reporting of Fiji's fiscal position and public debt while ensuring that borrowing is undertaken in a prudent and responsible manner to support national development priorities and long-term economic sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, said it is important to distinguish between projected and actual outcomes. While the honourable Member referenced a projected public debt level of $11.7 billion or 79.8 percent of GDP by July 2026, the actual Government debt as at 31st July stood at approximately $11.4 billion, consisting of $7.5 billion in domestic borrowings and $3.8 billion in external debt obligations equivalent to approximately 81.0 percent of GDP based on the nominal GDP of $14.1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, debt servicing comprises both interest payments, principal payments and miscellaneous charges. While interest payments are paid through ordinary revenues, principal repayments, on the other hand, are made through refinancing of bonds. In the financial year 2005-2026, total debt financing stood at $1.12 billion, comprising $519.2 million in interest payments, $593.4 million of principal repayments and $3.7 million in miscellaneous and short-term financing expenses. As such, interest expense as a percentage of total government revenue of around $4.05 billion stood at around 12.5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as at 30th September, 2026, total Government debt has increased to approximately $11.6 billion, 200 more from the July figure, comprising $7.6 billion in domestic debt and $4 billion in external debt. Based on the estimated nominal GDP of $14.8 billion, the debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 78.4 percent. While the debt stock increased between July and September, the debt-to-GDP ratio declined largely due to the increase in nominal GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, turning to debt servicing obligations, total debt servicing for 2026-2027 is currently budgeted at approximately $1.03 billion. This consists of interest payments of around $572 million and principal repayments of $436.3 million and $4.4 million for miscellaneous and short-term charges. As at the end of September, the Government had already serviced approximately $195.4 million in debt obligations, which comprises $113.0 million in interest payments, $81.1 million in principal repayments, and $1.3 million in miscellaneous charges. In the same period, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government collected total revenue of around $818.8 million. As such, interest as a percentage of this government revenue stood at around 13.8 percent as at the 30th September.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the composition of Fiji's debt portfolio continues to reflect the Government's strategy of maintaining a balanced mix between domestic and external borrowing. Domestic debt accounts for approximately 65 percent of total debt, while external debt accounts for approximately 35 percent, and this approach helps diversify financing sources while managing refinancing, exchange rate, and interest rate risk.

By July 2027, or the end of the current financial year, government debt is projected to rise to $12.6 billion, or 84.8 percent of GDP out of which, domestic debt is expected to rise to $8.2 billion, while external debt is projected at $4.4 billion.

Mr. Speaker Sir, as I mentioned earlier, public borrowing has enabled the Government to finance critical investments in infrastructure, development, education, health care services, social protection programmes, climate adaptation, and resilience initiatives and economic development projects that support growth and improve the well-being of all Fijians.

HON. P. D. KUMAR. - My question is related to the World Bank Economic Outlook, where the report very clearly said that Fiji has limited fiscal space for borrowing. This is definitely a concern, considering we are heading into El Niño, and of course, we are also heading into the cyclone months.

My question to you, Minister, if we look at the current situation where 82 cents of a dollar goes towards running the Government, and only 18 cents is for the development work, and you have just stated that most of this money is going towards capital work, but we all know how much of that is going towards capital work. So, what measures are in place to reduce the government expenditure, so that you can improve the fiscal space?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kumar is aware, we have already made a budget for this financial year. It considers what I can call the crisis that we are facing, stemming from fuel issues that started in February. We did some adjustments between then and the end of the financial year, July and we carried on some of the mitigation measures until now. We are aware of the issues with our debt, as well as what was needed to keep the economy going, and sustain our people especially the vulnerable.

For this financial year, I do not think we can do much, and the World Bank and ADB are aware of those. We have a capital expenditure programme that we need to undertake, which started from September and onwards. Hopefully this crisis will go away. It is not only Fiji, but the whole world is also facing this issue. We came back from meeting with ADB and the World Bank, and that is the same issue. We cannot do much with the current crisis that is facing the whole world. For Fiji, we have already taken the issues into account, and part of that started this year, including cost-cutting measures, as well as rationalising our expenditure.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, you mentioned that about 35 percent of our debt component is owed to externally. Can you roughly give us a breakdown, apart from the lending agencies, who are our partners that we owe money to?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I provided this figure in one of the earlier questions, but roughly, ADB is the major lender for us. It is over 35 percent if I am correct. The second is the World Bank.

Informing Overseas Fijians on Proposed Constitutional Amendments
(Question No. 270/2026)

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

> Can the honourable Prime Minister, and Minister for Civil Service, and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, and Public Enterprises inform Parliament what measures will the Government implement to ensure that Fijian citizens residing overseas are adequately informed about the proposed constitutional

amendments ahead of the national referendum?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Koroilavesau for his question. A very important question concerning the participation of Fijian residents residing overseas in the proposed constitutional amendment process. The Government recognises that any proposed amendment must be subject to an inclusive, transparent, and well-informed national process. Our responsibility is to ensure that every Fijian has access to accurate information and a reasonable opportunity to understand the proposed amendments and participate in the process ahead of the national referendum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, public interest in the consultation process has been very encouraging. The livestream consultation recorded 50,254 viewers at the Ba Market Hall on 9th October, and 47,178 at Vunimono Hall in Nausori on 15th October, and 45,196 at Labasa Civic Centre on 24th October. These figures demonstrate the value of accessible consultation platforms and the importance of extending these opportunities to Fijians living abroad. The Government recognises that our diaspora remains an integral part of our national community. Their perspectives and contributions should form part of the broader national conversation on the proposed constitutional amendment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government made the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 and its accompanying information booklet available through official government platforms, including its website and social media channels. In addition, the Parliamentary Special Committee's public consultations have been live-streamed, allowing Fijians overseas to follow the proceedings, hear the issues raised, and better understand the proposed amendments. These arrangements provide overseas-based Fijians with direct access to the Bill and the discussions of it, enabling them to make informed assessments rather than rely on second-hand information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Prime Minister has consulted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, which has advised that no formal submissions have yet been received from Fijians residing overseas. In response, Fiji's diplomatic missions have been requested to strengthen engagement with diaspora communities by disseminating information on the Bill, advising on the extended consultation period, and encouraging Fijians overseas to submit their views. This is facilitated through our diplomatic missions, using the established communications channels and diaspora networks to extend the reach of the consultation process.

The extension of the Parliamentary Special Committee term and the deferment of its report, as approved by Parliament, have provided additional time for the public's awareness and participation. This is particularly very important for Fijians overseas who face practical challenges associated with geographical distance, different time zones, and access to consultation arrangements.

The Referendum Act of 2026 also provide for the preparation of publication of a summary record of Parliamentary debate on the Bill by the Secretary-General to Parliament. This will further support public understanding by making the issues considered in Parliament accessible to citizens. The Government's approach is clear. Constitutional reform must be supported by an informed public and an inclusive process that allows Fijians, both at home and abroad, to understand and consider the proposed changes.

We will continue working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade and our diplomatic missions to ensure that Fijians overseas are adequately informed and encouraged to participate. Ultimately, this is a matter of national importance. Every Fijian should have a fair and meaningful opportunity to understand the proposals and make their voices heard.

Decentralisation Programme: Immigration Services in Fiji
(Question No. 271/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Immigration inform Parliament on the progress of the decentralisation programme of Immigration services in Fiji?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are continuing to advance the decentralisation programme to ensure that immigration services are available, accessible and convenient for people to access. We had opened our new office at Nakasi on 23rd September, and that office is functioning very well.

From 23rd September to 30th October, just a few days ago, a total of 635 customers have come in, and most of them for passport services. It would be of interest to the honourable Member to ask the question, we have opened an office in Rakiraki on 23rd October, and in the one week that it has been in operation, from 23rd to 30th October, a total of 69 have accessed their services. The other two offices we intend to open is in Nabouwalu and we have found space at Naulumatua House. We are trying to find space in Sigatoka. With those offices, it will take a maximum of maybe one and a half hours for anybody to access immigration services here in Fiji.

In addition to opening those offices, we have outreach programmes. We have been to Navosa - we teamed up with the Ministry of Youth and Sports when they had a roadshow there. We came back and sat in Sigatoka and in one day we got 230 people who came in and applied for passport in Sigatoka and that is one of the reasons why we want to set up an office there. Over the last few weeks, we travelled to Rotuma and conducted immigration services there and the next trip will be to Taveuni and Kadavu. It is progressing very well.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Immigration and the Government for the opening of the new immigration office in Rakiraki. On behalf of the *vanua o* Ra, we are really grateful for the newly established office. Now my supplementary question is, in terms of the diaspora community, how can they be assisted with this decentralisation programme?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the diaspora community, we have also been doing outreach programmes, we just came back from New Zealand where 433 were served. We just went to two cities Auckland and Christchurch. This week, from the 5th they will be in Australia:

- 5th to 9th November, in Brisbane;
- 12th to 16th November in Sydney; and
- 19th to 23rd November in Melbourne.

This is plugging the gap right now in addition to the services that are provided by our high commissions, embassies and the consulates that are outside of Fiji.

The bigger plan for diaspora is the upgrade that we are doing to our passport system. We bought the printer, we have written the programme and set up a new server. This will allow those to apply for passport renewal online. That will ease the burden because we know there are only a few embassies outside of Fiji. For example, in the United States of America, you have to come all the way from one coast to the other to access passport services. This is in progress, and we hope to complete it. Cabinet has also already endorsed that we can outsource passport services. That we are intending to do, but we need to set up the system first before we outsource.

If you apply for a visa to go to Australia or New Zealand, it will be the same company that we will outsource this to. For all those services, the local outreach, the two new offices that we have opened, that outreach we did to New Zealand, we served a total of 1,522 Fijians, and we generated a total of $315,634 in revenue for the services that were required.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, listening to the statistics given by the Minister, particularly for the Nasinu area, with more than 600 applications, seems pretty justified. However, looking at Rakiraki with just 69 applications, what is the cost of maintaining the Rakiraki office? Do you foresee that there will be more applications coming or are we going to hear that the Rakiraki office had to be closed because we are not receiving sufficient applications?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. If you had listened to what the honourable Minister for Tourism, the Deputy Prime Minister, talked about earlier in one of the questions on how Rakiraki is developing, and tourism is happening over there, it is not only trying to provide services to our community, but we are really moving with the development that is happening in the area. For now, for those from Wainibuka right up to Tavua, Rakiraki, Ba, if they need services, they go all the way to Lautoka or they come all the way to Suva for that service. I think it is a good strategic location for the services to our citizens and also to cover for the big development that is happening in the Ra area.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, we appreciate the decentralisation, but the services that they provide. My question is more along the processing of work permits or extensions. We do receive from the public and we refer it to your office, and thank you for the assistance, honourable Minister. Will this be decentralised as well or will it be centralised within the main office of the Ministry?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition, for permit services, permits and visa, they are all online now. Before, it was manual, and you would go to one of the offices, immigration offices, to lodge your permit application. For now, all the immigration services are online. You can just lodge your application online or extension for permits and visas. Including the other services that we provide, citizenship is also now online. That came on this year. So all the services are available online. You can just lodge from anywhere. It is our passport services because of the nature of that service and most of the time, we require face-to-face interaction. That is why we are decentralising a little bit. It is more about passports than permits. As I said, permits is available online. You can apply for it from anywhere.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Minister, can you explain how it will be possible to assist the people in maritime areas where we do not have electricity? How are you going to provide your services to the people, maybe in Lau and other Lomaiviti?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Immigration services, for citizens, is mainly passports and citizenship. It is not a service that you want to acquire regularly. Once you get a passport, it is after ten years or nine and a half years that you go back to an immigration office. You either renew or if you lost it then you have to go back earlier.

For those in the maritime area, so I said that we were going to go to the bigger islands, Taveuni next and Kadavu, I know from Lau, if you are from my island, from Vatoa, if you want a passport, you are about to go overseas, you will just come one go, do your passport and then get onto the plane because it is so far, just to come and get a passport, go back and then sit around and come back. But if we receive information that there is a big number of people in an island that want that service, we can easily just deploy over there and go and serve them where they are.

MR. SPEAKER.- So, honourable Minister, the proposal by honourable Rokomatu for a sub-office in Wailevu in Wainibuka will be on the list? Thank you, honourable Minister.

Youth Employment Programmes and Graduate Job Placement Rates
(Question No. 272/2026)

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

> Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports update Parliament on the performance and expansion of national youth employment programmes, specifically focusing on job placement rates for recent university and technical graduates?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question concerning the performance and expansion of National Youth Employment Programmes, particularly the job placement outcomes for recent university and technical graduates. First, I wish to clarify that the Ministry of Youth and Sports primarily caters for young people who have fallen out of the formal education system and may not have had opportunities to pursue further academic or technical qualifications.

Nevertheless, the transition from education to employment remains an important concern for young Fijians and their families. We recognise that qualifications represent, years of hard work, investment and it is our responsibility to help our young people translate their skills into meaningful employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry contributes to youth employment through practical skills training, youth empowerment, enterprise development and partnerships with employers and other stakeholders. Our approach recognises that preparing young people for employment goes beyond qualifications. It requires relevant skills, employment preparation, access to opportunities and practical workplace experience.

Through our youth training centres, we provide practical training and personal development opportunities particularly for young people requiring alternative pathways into employment and self-reliance. Our programmes include areas such as agriculture, carpentry, music, while also promoting skills, discipline, teamwork, leadership and essential life skills.

We also take training directly into communities through mobile training programmes and partnerships with training providers. This is particularly important for rural and maritime communities where transportation costs, connectivity and geographical isolation can limit access to training. For example, in February 2026, a government report highlighted mobile skills training delivered through a partnership between the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Fiji National University at Naisisili in Yasawa. The initiative also provided communities with access to advise on financial literacy, entrepreneurship and other development needs. This demonstrates our commitment to bringing opportunities closer to our young people.

Programme Performance and Graduate Outcomes - Mr. Speaker, Sir, turning to programme performance during the 2024/2025 financial year, the Ministry's Youth Training Centre Programmes recorded a total of 334 graduates. Out of these graduates, 63 percent entered paid employment, became self-employed or continued with further education and training.

I wish to emphasise that these figures represent the consolidated outcomes of our Youth Training Centre graduates for a 12-month reporting period. They should not be interpreted as the national employment placement rate for all university and technical graduates in Fiji.

The Ministry does not independently hold comprehensive employment outcome data for every university and technical graduate nationally. Establishing a reliable national placement rate requires coordinated information from educational institutions, employment services and employers. Our responsibility is to accurately report to the young people supported through our programmes while working with relevant agencies to strengthen the overall picture of graduate employment outcomes.

Connecting training to employment opportunities - Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also seeing encouraging examples of targeted training translating into livelihood opportunities. A July 2026 Report of the Ministry's tourism and hospitality partnership with the New Zealand High Commission highlighted 35 young people from Matacawalevu Village and surrounding communities, who received training with participants subsequently moving into tourism employment. This demonstrates the value of partnership that have been identified employment opportunities, prepare young people with relevant skills, connect them with prospective employers within their own communities.

Haruharu connecting job seekers and employers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, an important initiative in strengthening employment connections is *Haruharu,* a Japanese app. The Ministry's online job placement platform launched in 2025. The platform is now operational and provides an additional avenue for job seekers and employers to connect. For recent graduates, identifying vacancies and knowing where to apply can be challenging. Similarly, employers may experience difficulties finding suitable candidates. *Haruharu* seeks to address this gap by bringing job seekers and businesses closer together through a digital employment platform. To further strengthen its effectiveness and reach, the ministry is working towards a partnership agreement with social innovation Fiji.

The proposed partnership will strengthen cooperation in promoting the platform, supporting users, engaging employers, and improving employment outcome reporting. Importantly, the success of *Haruharu* must not be measured simply by registrations or advertised vacancies. What matters is whether it helps people secure meaningful and sustainable employment. We therefore need to monitor key indicators, including the number of registered job seekers and genuine vacancies advertised, the number of applicants progressing into interviews and receiving employment offers, the number of individuals successfully commencing employment, the number of individuals remaining employed over time. These indicators will help us measure the platform's actual contribution to youth employment and identify areas for improvement. I encourage businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, to advertise genuine vacancies and consider young graduates and other youth applicants.

I also encourage young job seekers to maintain accurate profiles, apply for suitable positions, and respond promptly to prospective employers. While digital platforms provide important opportunities, technology alone cannot address every employment barrier some young people require assistance. How our divisional offices, youth networks, and training partners can provide practical assistance, particularly to young people in rural and maritime communities. We also recognise the importance of stronger coordination across government. The National Employment Centre has introduced a digital local employment registration to strengthen employment services and improve access to opportunities.

The Ministry's work through *Haruharu s*hould complement these existing initiatives and contribute to a more coordinated employment support system. Any information sharing arrangements must be properly agreed with appropriate safeguards to protect personal information. In conclusion, youth employment is not simply an employment issue. It is an investment in Fiji's economic and social future. When a young person secures meaningful employment, the benefits extend beyond the individual to their family and community. When a young graduate establishes a viable business, that enterprise can create further employment opportunities for others.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports remains committed to strengthening pathways that connect skills development, employment preparation, enterprise support, and meaningful employment opportunities. Our young people are not simply the future of Fiji. They are an important part of Fiji's development today. We must continue investing in their capabilities, creating opportunities for their participation, and ensuring that no young person is left behind.

Addressing Yacht Clearance and Administrative Issues
(Question No. 273/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament of the Ministry's coordination with relevant agencies to address yacht clearance and administrative issues raised by the yachting sector?

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, yachting matters to our tourism economy. As reported at the yacht stakeholders meeting, Fiji welcomed 824 international yachts in 2025. Direct visitor expenditure from yachting was approximately $52 million, and the sector's total contribution to the economy is estimated at $57.4 million. Much of the money is spent in marinas, local businesses, and island communities outside our main tourism centres.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation does not clear yachts. Clearance and approvals rest with Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Department of Immigration, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Health and Medical Services and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, each under its legislation.

Right now, the Ministry's role is to bring industry and these agencies to the same table. Records need to be done and follow up until it is done. On October 7, 2026, I opened the yacht stakeholders meeting at the Tanoa International Hotel in Nadi. Marine operators, yacht agents, maritime operators, and tourism stakeholders met the responsible agencies face-to-face. Some of the matters raised have been with us for more than a decade. The meeting identified five key areas of action.

(1) Ports of entry - Port Denarau is recognised differently under customs and quarantine arrangements, and Savusavu is recognised as a port of entry by every border agency. This creates uncertainty and added cost for visiting yachts. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is reviewing the Quarantine Act and the Public Health Act with the Office of the Solicitor General. The Ministry will support the review in relation to Port Denarau and Savusavu.

(2) Out-of-port clearance fees - Out-of-port clearance fees, yachts, railings, visiting remote islands that are not ports of entry, face high clearance costs. A revised fee structure has been submitted to the Office of the Solicitor General as part of the proposed Quarantine Amendments. Any change remains subject to the proper approval process. The aim is charges that are predictable and proportionate without weakening public health safeguards.

(3) Free maritime licencing and Fijian crew - Maritime licencing, industry raised delays in the use of coastal trading permits and different interpretations of the rules of Fijian crew working aboard private non-commercial yachts. The Ministry is taking these up with the ministry responsible for Transport and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, including whether amendments to the Maritime Transport Act 2013 are needed.

(4) Community anchorage fees - Visiting yachts are asking for clear and consistent advance information on the fees charged in cruising areas. The ministry is working with the iTaukei Affairs Authorities and Provincial Council on this, with full respect to the rights of the resource owners. We will consider what bearing the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill passed by the House in August has on these arrangements.

(5) Duplicated paperwork and inconsistent procedures - The yacht management system developed by the Fiji Revenue Customs Service offers the most immediate improvements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very positive development. The yacht management system is a central, web-based system for processing yachts entering, cruising and departing Fiji. It replaces a legacy database and manual procedures. It covers craft registration, pre-arrival notification, voyage, passenger and crew details, declarations, agencies approvals, clearance certificates and coastal cruising applications.

For yacht masters and agents, the changes are critical. The current 13-page C2C documentation is reduced to three pages. A yacht details are registered once and updated when needed. A single submission is available to Customs, Health, the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Immigration and iTaukei Affairs Board, according to their functions. They remove separate forms, emails, and repeated requests for the same documents. Pre-arrival information lets agencies assess a yacht before it arrives, and clearance certificates are issued electronically.

The FRCS advises that system development, functional testing, and user acceptance testing with participating stakeholders are complete. Training has been delivered at all customs ports. Awareness activities are complete. FRCS will launch the system shortly. FRCS has not yet mentioned how much faster clearance will be. It will monitor clearance times and user feedback once the system is running.

Secondly, a set platform is the first step. Linking the system with the Immigration border management system and adding automated risk assessments are planned for the third phase of development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is finalising the action metrics that brings together every issue raised at the meeting, the agency responsible, and the agreed response. It will be circulated to the agencies and many industry representatives for confirmation, and the Ministry will use it to track progress. Some of these issues can be fixed through clearer guidance and better coordination. Others need legal review, regulatory change, or decisions by the agencies responsible.

The Ministry will keep pressing on both. A visiting yacht should know what the requirements are, what the charges are, and what steps clearance involves. We will deliver that while keeping Fiji's border security, public health, and biosecurity safeguards in place.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2024-2025 Budget, it actually reduced the stay period for yachts in Fiji from five years, which was introduced during COVID-19, back to 24 months, which is two years.

Now, as a committee, when we visited and met the Yacht Association, they requested if this time frame can be increased from two years to a little more. Considering the global condition at the moment with all things going wrong for many countries, economy slowing, cost increasing, is there any possibility for the Government to consider increasing the yachts' stay in Fiji for a little longer than 24 months because they do spend quite a substantial amount of money into our economy?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is very true. It used to be five years, and then it

came down to two years. My Ministry is pushing for the length of staying to be five years.

The honourable Member is correct. The longer they stay in Fiji, the more they spend. It is certainly an area that we are exploring, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, we appreciate the efforts undertaken by the Ministry to improve this coordination. But I want to ask the issue about existing mechanisms, if I may say.

The Maritime Essential Services Centre have got this coordination. In the Ministry of Defence, they have the fusion centre already in existence to coordinate all the border agencies. Is that something that we can piggyback on in order to improve this work?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I stated, we have to go through five. five agencies for approvals. One, the Fijian Revenue Customs Services, Department of Immigration, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Health and Medical Services and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji. As I have stated, we have to go through five agencies for approvals. One, the Fijian Revenue Customs Services, Department of Immigration, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Health and Medical Services and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji. There is a bit of frustration with the yachties when they come to Fiji.

The forum that we hosted in Nadi was for the first time that the government agency sat on one side and the operators sat on this side. I have to admit that yachting was not really high on my priority list, but I know how much they are contributing to the economy and I began to appreciate how difficult it is for yachts. This facility by FRCS, I believe, will go a long way in resolving all these. It is going to be one stop, it is a single window with all the information that you have, and as we say there, from 13 pages to about three pages in terms of the approvals and all that. I am quite looking forward to the to the launching of this facility by FRCS. We could be doing a lot more, but people say that it can be, it can be very frustrating trying to get all these permits while cruising in the Fiji waters.

Public Toilet and Accessibility Facilities at Rotuma Jetty
(Question No. 274/2026)

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

> Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on whether the Rotuma Jetty has a functioning public toilet and washroom facilities for passengers, including elderly persons, persons with disabilities and families travelling to and from the Island?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government recognises the importance of providing safe, accessible and appropriate passenger facilities at our maritime jetties. It is essential in ensuring comfort, dignity and convenience. The Government has inherited several infrastructure facilities in a deteriorated state early 2023, particularly within our maritime communities. Since taking office, we have prioritised the maintenance and rehabilitation of essential infrastructure, including roads and maritime facilities. Rotuma roads have been improved on jetty and connecting bridge repaired. Other upgrades, including the water infrastructure, power station and the hospital.

The existing passenger facility at Oinafa Jetty is currently closed to public use due to its deteriorated condition. This includes the public toilet and facilities. The Fiji Roads Authority has already undertaken an assessment of the facility and the necessary refurbishment works are included to commence in the second quarter of the financial year. The refurbishment will include disability-friendly

provisions to improve accessibility and ensure the facility caters for all the needs of passengers.

The Government remains committed to ensuring that infrastructure development is inclusive and that no members of our communities are left behind. We recognise the importance of such facilities at our jetty and wharf locations.

Outsourcing Industry and Strategic Plan
(Question No. 275/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on the Outsourcing Industry and its Strategic Plan?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I always talk about the business outsourcing industry, I am somewhat conflicted because of my historical association with the BPO industry. We will give credit where credit is due. The formation of the equivalent of Tourism Fiji, which is now called Outsource Fiji, happened during the time of a previous Government and I happened to be in the actual inaugural committee that formed the Outsource Fiji which is then called the Business Process Outsourcing Council of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, at that time, there was estimated about 4,000 to 5,000 workers in this industry and the actual recognition by the Government happened around the COVID-19 crisis, when the need to diversify the Fijian economy became quite apparent. The outsource industry is becoming an increasingly important contributor to the economy of Fiji. It represents an opportunity for Fiji to diversify its economy, as I mentioned, expand the service export industry and attract international business, most importantly creating meaningful employment for our young people.

Mr. Speaker, outsourcing nowadays is not simply about providing customer service operations or telephone centres. The industry has evolved where it now encompasses:

- financial services;
- accounting and information technology services;
- administrative support;
- engineering support;
- digital solutions; and
- other specialised services delivered to international clients from Fiji.

The outsourcing industry has demonstrated a significant growth since its inception. According to Outsource Fiji's recent April 2026 Industry Update, the sector employs approximately 9,500 people, with young people accounting for 80 percent of the workforce. Of particular significance is the participation of women who now make up 70 percent of the industry's workforce. This demonstrates the important role the sector plays in promoting women's economic participation, financial independence, and professional development.

The industry is also providing opportunities for young Fijians to develop international skills, gain professional experience, and build rewarding career paths without having to leave their families and communities for overseas employment.

Fiji's reputation as a growing BPO destination is continuing to take leaps and bounds. In 2025, the CX Technology Global Services Survey done by Ryan Strategic Advisory, which was released in

May 2026, ranked Fiji among the world's top five favoured offshore customer experience destinations based on the views of 815 enterprise decision makers across 12 markets.

Of particular interest, respondents in New Zealand and Singapore ranked Fiji as their most favoured destination. This is an important endorsement of the quality of our workforce the professionalism of our service providers, and Fiji's growing competitiveness as an outsourcing destination.

Mr. Speaker Sir, Outsource Fiji, which is the body that represents the outsourcing industry is supported by the Government of Fiji and in recent times by the Market Development Facility, which is sponsored by the Australian and New Zealand governments. Through its Board and Secretariat, Outsource Fiji provides leadership, and coordinates international market initiatives, facilitates business engagements and workforce development.

The industry has begun engaging not only the Australia and New Zealand partners but developing wider sort of market bases or potential market bases, even including the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. And there are very interesting opportunities emerging from those markets. These developments clearly demonstrate that these opportunities are not confined to traditional markets. We have the potential to establish ourselves, if we have not already, as the regional hub for business and professional services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, central to the industry's growth is the Outsource Fiji 2026-2030 plan, which precedes the previous strategic plan five years ago. This plan sets ambitious targets for the industry, with the expectation to generate up to $500 million in foreign exchange earnings for Fiji by 2030, and increasing employment to 15,000 people. When compared with the approximately 9,500 people, employees reported in April 2026, this represents an additional 5,500 employment opportunities, or close to 58 percent growth in the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the Strategic Plan is built around a few pillars:

- Industry Growth and Market Positioning;
- Talent, Skills, and Workforce Development;
- Policy Advocacy and National Influence;
- Infrastructure and Technology and Ecosystem Enablement;
- Member Value and Industry Services; and
- Organisational Capability and Governance and Sustainability.

In the interest of time, Mr. Speaker, I will pick up on just two areas for the benefit of this House. The first is Talent, Skills, and Workforce Development - there is planning to continue to intensify investment in skills in this area of development for our young. I am happy to report that just recently, Google provided 1,000 scholarships for ICT training, and between us and the Ministry of Communications, we will be progressively handing out those scholarships. CISCO, the international networking company globally, has just established a technology hub in USP, focussing on Artificial Intelligence and cybersecurity. They have started training young men and women across the Pacific in that hub, and we expect to sort of see more employment coming out of those two particular very high-level skills, Mr. Speaker Sir.

In terms of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is the fourth pillar, we all know that Google is already building four cables into the country from the West Coast of America, South America, Australia, and Southeast Asia, which will position this industry very well in terms of its future, Mr. Speaker. Apart from this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the development of the second strategic plan makes absolute sense, because it clearly underpins the major potential for this industry, the benefits that will flow to the

country, and most importantly, as we talk about youth employment and the need to employ more of our young, this industry sits very well, when it comes to the development of our young talent and workforce for the future.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for a very detailed response, and I also thank Outsource Fiji for the wonderful work they have been doing. There has been a continuous progress which we have seen over the years, and that is pretty positive for Fiji. But we cannot ignore the fact that in overseas, AI automation, due to that, lots of job losses have occurred recently in the financial sector. Most banks are laying off their staff. While developing this industry's strategy was AI automation considered as one of the concerns that can affect the outsourcing industry?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Premila Kumar for that question and, yes, artificial intelligence does pose a risk to the outsourced sector. That is why I particularly mentioned at the beginning that apart from the typical outsource services which was answering phone calls, Fiji is starting to transition very rapidly towards more what we call knowledge process outsourcing and that means development of more ICT based services, et cetera.

There is a particular keenness at the moment to develop or accelerate development in cyber security services particularly cyber analyst training. The reason for that is according to Cisco, the global shortage of cyber security analysts is about $4.5 million right now. Fiji is able to position itself as a hub for cyber security analytics, we will do quite well in the space and on top of that we are quite competitive when it comes to salaries.

The other area also, Mr. Speaker, there is a focus on Artificial Intelligence sort of capability in Fiji. If you recall, I mentioned there is already training now happening in University of the South Pacific through the Tech Hub at USP, but *Google* training scholarships includes AI and cybersecurity, as well as areas of potential training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on top of that, there are some conversations happening at the moment with quite substantial cybersecurity companies to try and see if they can come and base themselves in Fiji including a large AI company as well. I do not want to say much other than that because there are conversations at the moment, but should they come to fruition it will certainly position the country well. So yes, AI is a threat to the industry, which is why the industry themselves have started to pivot to more value addition, knowledge-based outsourcing to be able to ensure that they ride the wave.

Just incidentally, Mr. Speaker, there is AI capability already in Fiji. KPMG Australia has an AI Hub based in Sports City here in Fiji. There is about I think 30 or 40 staff young men and women working from there serving KPMG. The capability is clearly already in the country and all we need to do is just continue to provide as a Government. I am sure you know every year, Outsource Fiji appreciates the approval of their budgetary allocation. Just to think about it in terms of return, we spend about $2 million on Outsource Fiji.

The foreign exchange we earn right now from Outsource Fiji is $300 million in foreign exchange and growing. It is a promising industry, and honourable Kumar has rightly pointed out that AI is indeed a threat but for now from what we can see, we are certainly mitigating the threat by pivoting through sort of a knowledge based outsourcing system.

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, you talked about the $400 million target by 2030. I recalled in the IMF or World Bank Report in the late 2022 or early 2023 on the KPO and BPO sectors, you have talked about infrastructure. One of the recommendations there was for the host country to even provide infrastructure so that we can attract the, so, you know, region holdings, unit trust, FNPF. And perhaps the second part to that is, I know that it is concentrated now in Lautoka

and Nadi, Suva, we have talked about Levuka yesterday, PAFCO is the only main, so thoughts of decentralisation as well and infrastructure. But if you are going to decentralise, do not go beyond Korovou, do not go to Wainibuka, just stay within.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, that is a very good question. We have somewhat been blessed since we got into government, because apart from Google coming into town, which virtually sorted out the risk that we had in the industry up till then, which was we only had one subsea cable running from Australia to Fiji, which was the Southern Cross, all of a sudden, internationally we now have five connections to the world. And that really makes the whole industry quite robust from customers.

On top of that, both Vodafone, because of the introduction of 5G, Vodafone, Digicel, Telecom have been laying fiber all around the country. In Vanua Levu, as you know, they are now sort of, I believe they have already gone, started building towards Savusavu, and the plan is to go towards Nabouwalu as well. If that happens, that will continue to open up opportunities in the ICT area.

And finally, to your point about decentralising, one of the larger operations has started attempting to do that. Pacific Centrecom, which is one of the large BPO service providers, now has bases in Vitogo, at the Grace Roads in Vitogo. They occupy the whole, sort of half of the upstairs of that Vitogo shopping, Grace Roads Shopping Mall. I believe they were in Navua, but I think they were pulled back. But they were looking at Navua. They were in Navua, and this plan is to look at Labasa, and perhaps look at other destinations. They are also based in Nadi, on the back road to the Sheraton. So to your point, honourable Leader of the Opposition, you are correct.

The industry is already looking down that road of moving that end, because of the 5G being late, and connecting it up. We are, kind of in a very fortunate position, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because whilst we had high ambition when we started as a government, the entry of Google, introduction of 5G, introduction of Starlink, has really carried some impetus to this industry.

We actually believe Mr. Speaker, Sir, that in 20 years' time, it will probably be a billion-dollar industry. And again, as we grow, we need to make sure that the training is right, and the infrastructure continues to be addressed. That is why this five-year strategic plan is quite important, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Written Questions

Overseas Medical Treatment: Applications, Costs & Waiting List
(Question No. 276/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the overseas treatment assistance provided by the Ministry for the 2025-2026 financial year-

(a) how many applications were received for overseas medical treatment;
(b) how many patients were sent overseas for treatment;
(c) what was the total cost incurred by the government; and
(d) how many patients are on the waiting list?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 276/2026.

Drug-Related Cases Involving Minors by Division
(Question No. 277/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament on the number of drug-related cases involving persons under the age of 18 that were recorded from 2023 to date, broken down by Division?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 277/2026.

Online Safety Act 2018: Complaints Received, Resolved & Outstanding
(Question No. 278/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament with respect to the following –

(a) how many complaints were received under the Online Safety Act 2018 during the 2025-2026 financial year;
(b) how many complaints were resolved; and
(c) how many complaints remain outstanding?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 278/2026.

Wheel Tax and Road User Levy Revenue
(Question No. 279/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the total revenue collected from wheel tax and the road user levy during the 2025-2026 financial year, broken down by each revenue source?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 279/2026.

ECAL Revenue, Expenditure & Fund Allocation
(Question No. 280/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance provide the following information on the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL) –

(a) what is the total amount of levy collected from its introduction till April 2022, broken down by financial year;
(b) of the total revenue collected, how much was spent on projects, and what was the current unspent balance (if any); and

(c) how much was spent on climate adaptation, environmental protection, disaster resilience, and the relocation of vulnerable communities, with a breakdown by category?

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

REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS' ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the following Reports, the:

(a) Review Report on the 2019-2020 Ministry of Local Government Annual Report, tabled on 29th September, 2026.
(b) Review Report on the 2018 Nasinu Town Council Annual Report, tabled on 30th September, 2026.
(c) Review Report on the 2020 Tavua Town Council Annual Report, tabled on 30th September, 2026.
(d) Consolidated Review Reports on the 2019, 2020 (January to July) and 2020-2021 Labasa Town Council Annual Reports, tabled on 30th September, 2026.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. I. S. VANAWALU.- Mr Speaker, Sir, Review Report (a) – Review Report on the Ministry of Local Government 2019-2020 Annual Report. The Committee conducted a detailed examination of the Ministry's performance, financial management, strategic priorities, and service delivery during the review period. The objective was to assess whether the Ministry effectively discharged its responsibilities in promoting good municipal governance, urban development, infrastructure services, and sustainable community development.

The Committee's examination of the Ministry of Local Government's 2019-2020 Annual Report reveals 10 key findings which form the basis of seven recommendations, aimed at improving Government's service delivery and operational effectiveness. The Local Government institution plays a vital role in improving the quality of life of the citizens and supporting national development. While the Ministry has achieved notable progress in several areas, challenges remain in project implementation, financial management, as well as environmental sustainability. The Committee is confident that the recommendations contained in this Report will assist the Ministry in strengthening Government's service delivery and ensuring a better outcome for all the people of Fiji.

Review Report (b) – Review Report on the Nasinu Town Council 2018 Annual Report. Nasiru remains Fiji's largest municipality by population and continues to experience a significant urban growth. While this growth presents opportunities, it also places increasing pressure on the municipal services, infrastructure, waste management system, and financial resources. The Committee recognises that these challenges require coordinated planning and sustainable solution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in reviewing the Nasinu Town Council 2018Annual Report, the Committee identified four key findings and made four corresponding recommendations for the Council's consideration. The Committee is confident that the recommendations contained in this Report will assist the Nasinu Town Council in strengthening good governance, improving interagency

coordination, enhancing waste management strategies, and continuing collaboration on urban development initiatives that will contribute to a financial sustainable and effective local governance system.

Review Report (c) – Review Report on the Tavua Town Council 2020 Annual Report. I would like to inform this august House the historical economic significance of Tavua Town Council. Tavua was formally declared a town on 27th April, 1992 and has been administered under the Local Government Act 1972. The Town's development has historically been driven by sugarcane farming, agriculture, commerce and the nearby Vatukoula Gold Mining industry making Tavua an important services and training centre for the surrounding communities.

The Committee reviewed the 2020 Annual Report to assess the Council's governance financial performance, operation and service delivery. The review took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected municipal operations, development projects and economic activity within the town areas. Tavua Town Council continued to play a key role in supporting sustainable development, community well-being and essential municipal services for residents and businesses within the municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, during this review of the Tavua Council 2020 Annual Report, the Committee identified six key findings and subsequently made six recommendations to address these issues, raise and enhance the Council's performance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, local government institutions play a vital role in improving the quality of life of our citizens in supporting national development, and despite the challenges, the Committee noted that Tavua Town Council continued in its efforts to provide essential municipal services and support local development during this difficult period.

Review Report (d) - The Review Report on the 2019-2020 Annual Report (January to July) and Labasa Town Council 2020-2021 Annual Report. Labasa Town Council is a municipal authority responsible for the administration and development of Labasa Town, the largest urban centre on Vanua Levu in the Northern Division. The Town's growth is closely linked to the establishment of the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) company sugar mill way back in 1894. It transformed the area into a major sugar producing and commercial hub.

Mr. Speaker, during its review of the Labasa Town Council 2019-2021 Annual Report, the Committee identified five key findings and subsequently made five recommendations to address the issue raised, is to enhance the Council's performance. The Committee is confident that the recommendation contained in this Report will assist the Labasa Town Council in strengthening good governance, enhancing waste management strategy and continuing collaboration on urban development initiatives will contribute to a more financially sustainable and effective local government system.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open to debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me. Each speaker has been allocated 10 minutes to deliver their address, as agreed to by both sides of the House and at the end of the debate, the Chair will have a right to reply.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on *Parliamentary Paper Nos. 124, 126, 127 and 128 of 2026*, which encompass the Review of the Ministry of Local Government Annual Report and the Municipal Council Reports for Nasinu, Tavua and Labasa. These Reports provide a timely assessment of the state of local government

administration in Fiji. They highlight both the progress made and the challenges that continue to affect service delivery, municipal governance and infrastructure development. As we consider these findings, our focus must be firmly on preparedness, accountability and ensuring that our municipalities are equipped to meet the growing needs of our people.

Mr. Speaker, when we examine the financial and operational realities presented in these Reports, it becomes evident that many of our local authorities are operating under significant structural pressures. The reconstruction of Govind Park in Ba serves as a clear example. What began as a project estimated at $4.17 million in 2018, ultimately cost $13.8 million by its completion in July 2026, with the approved reconstruction contract value rising by $9.06 million. While we welcome the completion of this important facility, such cost escalations and delays highlight the need for stronger project oversight, better contract management and more rigorous financial controls.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, similar implementation challenges continue to affect developments across the country. Planned township projects in Nabouwalu and Keiyasi, as well as the Seaqaqa Market and bus stand development have experienced delays due to funding constraints, land acquisition issues, adverse weather conditions and relocation requirements. These projects are essential for regional growth and must be advanced with greater urgency.

The financial sustainability of our municipalities remains a major concern. Municipal rate arrears across Fiji's 13 municipalities now stand at approximately $71 million, accumulated over the past decade. This is not simply an accounting issue. It directly affects the ability of Councils to maintain roads, drainage systems, public facilities, waste services, and other essential municipal functions.

Nasinu provides a striking example. As Fiji's largest municipality, with a population exceeding 92,000 people, it generates approximately $3.1 million annually in rates revenue. Yet, a substantial portion of that income is absorbed by solid waste management and the costs associated with illegal dumping. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council continues to service almost 50 informal settlements, placing additional pressure on already stressed resources.

In Tavua, Sir, waste management has become financially unsustainable. The Council relies on ungazetted waste collection fees, while the service costs approximately $83,000 annually and recovers only a fraction of that expenditure. As a result, more than $60,000 must be subsidised each year from municipal resources. Compounding this challenge are ongoing sewerage seepage issues and inadequate wastewater treatment arrangements, which pose serious environmental and public health risks.

In Labasa, Sir, the repeal of business licencing removed approximately $200,000 in annual revenue. At the same time, the Council's service obligations have expanded into surrounding rural areas, stretching operational capacity. The fact that the Namara Landfill has already reached full capacity, further underscores the urgent need for long-term waste management planning. Mr. Speaker, Sir, while addressing these long-standing challenges remains important, we must also prepare for emerging risks that will directly affect our municipalities in the months ahead.

Fiji is experiencing developing *El Nino* conditions, bringing prolonged dry spells and significantly increasing the risk of wildfires. Open burning of rubbish continues in many areas, despite the dangers involved. Municipal councils working alongside enforcement agencies, must take a stronger stance against illegal burning, before preventable fires threaten homes, businesses, farms and public infrastructure.

Water security is another growing concern. Extended dry conditions place increasing pressure on water supplies, particularly in vulnerable communities. Councils must work closely with the Water Authority of Fiji to ensure that residents in both formal and informal settlements have reliable access to safe and clean drinking water during periods of drought.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another issue requiring urgent attention is the long overdue expansion of municipal boundaries. Across the rapidly growing urban corridors of Nasinu, Nausori, Nadi and Ba, numerous fully developed residential subdivisions remain outside municipal boundaries, despite already being serviced by roads, drainage, electricity and water infrastructure. These communities contribute significantly to economic activity and population growth, yet they continue to miss out on the full benefits of municipal services due to administrative delays. Resolving these boundary issues must be treated as a national priority. At the same time, municipal councils must modernise their internal systems, improve revenue collection, strengthen governance practices and build the technical capacity necessary to manage increasingly complex urban environments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the public expects results, not excuses. Our towns and cities will continue to grow and the challenge before us is ensuring that municipal infrastructure, services and governance keep pace with a modern and rapidly urbanisiting Fiji. We must strengthen municipal finances, improve waste management systems, accelerate urban planning reforms, embrace digital service delivery and build better resilience against future crisis.

These Committee Reports provide valuable recommendations to help achieve those objectives. I fully support the recommendations contained in *Parliamentary Paper Nos. 124, 126, 127 and 128 of 2026*.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Chairperson and the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the Review of the Ministry of Local Governments 2019-2020 Annual Report and the Annual Reports for Nasinu, Tavua and Labasa Town Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Reports covered different periods but raised close-related issues like operational sustainability, waste management systems, public facilities challenges and proper project management system to ensure that public expenditure is clearly accounted for. These issues affect the daily lives of residents, market vendors, businesses and commuters. They also affect communities beyond municipal boundaries that depend on the Council for services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, financially sustainable Councils are a better place to provide reliable services, maintain public assets and respond to community needs. Government support remains important alongside responsible collection and the management of Council revenue.

Our Coalition Government continues to provide waste collection subsidies for the past three years from 2023 to 2024, it went to $23.8 million. In 2024 to 2025, also at $3.8 million, and for the period 2025 to 2026, it increased to $4.7 million and for the current financial year, it increased to $5.2 million.

The Government also provides $1.5 million to Nasinu Town Council in waste management subsidies to support the provision of services to informal settlements. This allocation demonstrates continued support for essential services. To strengthen revenue streams, the Nasinu Town Council has completed its sectional valuation exercise following public consultation and tends to implement outcome from 1st August, 2027. The completion of this valuation exercise is an important step, but the additional income remains prospective, implementation must be accompanied by sound

financial management and consideration of the impact on ratepayers.

Nasinu Town Council is also considering commercial development of council land and assets including a proposed public-private partnership for its Valelevu Ground and these opportunities are under consideration rather than secured income.

For Tavua Town Council, there is also immeasurable improvement in its revenue stream with a $140,000 grant provided in 2025 for the acquisition of nine new parking meters. It is expected to earn approximately $2,500 monthly for the Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the Labasa Town Council, the repeal of business license fees in 2020 saw the receipt of an estimated $200,000 in annual revenue. The Ministry is developing business license regulations as part of the Local Government Review. We also work with Councils to review existing revenue streams, something that we have been amplifying to all the councils, that is to broaden the income base, be able to meet not only the present expenses, but also meet some capital expenses that may plan for the coming years. We must improve collection of applicable fees and identify alternative income opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, waste management is a common challenge and challenges differ between councils. Sustainable solutions must address collections and disposal while also reducing the amount of material that reaches dumpsites.

As seen as strengthened enforcement against illegal dumping and increase yellow skip bins in identified locations. Camera installation at dump sites is being progressed. These measures are intended to improve compliance and reduce avoidable clean-up expenditure. It provides services to more than 25 informal settlements covering approximately 2,788 households. This illustrates the demand placed on municipal services and the importance of government support for informal settlements waste management.

Facilities enforcement must be supported by sustained community engagement. The Council continues to work with leaders, residents as well as stakeholders on responsible disposal and reliable collection, correct use of bins, and community cooperation are all necessary to keep neighbourhoods clean.

For the Western Division, the Ministry is progressing the Western a regional centrally landfill project. The proposed system includes a regional landfill and multiple transfer stations where waste will be sorted for recycling, reuse, and composting, and only residual waste would be sent to landfill. The sale of recovered materials and compost will provide additional income for participating councils while reducing disposal volumes.

There is also challenge at the Namara Landfill which is now reaching it capacity, and there are a lot of risks associated with it - public health as well as environmental risks. It demands a longer-term disposal solution. The Ministry will also support Labasa Town Council to prioritise extending existing dump cells to address current capacity pressures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's approach also places great emphasis on recovering resources before they become a disposal burden and the Return & Earn Scheme, which was launched at Sigatoka Town in 2025, as well as launched across all municipalities in 2026, has also proven to be a very important strategy for the Ministry as well as for the councils.

From January to September 2026, the councils have managed to collect close to $17.7 million beverage containers that have been returned for recycling. Approximately $1.6 million have been paid to communities and councils, and 15 40-foot containers have been sent for recycling. Also this year, the Sigatoka Town have also launched a pilot project where the two pilot projects has been launched. Households roll out this plan for December 26, subject to the supply of bins.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Councils cannot resolve any infrastructure on public health issue alone - wastewater, roads, housing, and land responsibility require coordinated action with the relevant agencies and Tavua sewerage needs remain a priority. The Council has identified the treatment plant and the reticulation system as a long-term solution and also Tavua is discussing possible interim solutions, including a packaged treatment plant with the Water Authority of Fiji, while pursuing the permanent scheme and the proposed Asian Development Bank-funded survey is intended to assist planning.

Nasinu has also endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding with Water Authority of Fiji to improve information sharing and the referral of resolution of service complaints is also in the process of signing an MOA with FRA to also assist with issues regarding drainage within the municipal boundaries.

A very big challenge for the Nasinu Town Council is the issue on informal settlements. That is something that the Council is also now facing with the Ministry of Housing, as well as housing agencies and Housing Authority, as well as the Public Rental Board on the way forward. For Korovou, something that the Ministry is working right now, and also, there is now a plan for Korovou, approximately 50 acres of land have been secured and the project is at preliminary stage and, preparatory work includes business service and planning, and hopefully with more funding, able to have a more structured and well organised Korovou Town in the near future.

For Govind Park, Mr. Speaker Sir, something I want to clarify, there are two phases for Govind Park. Phase one was on the construction of a pavilion which cost around $4.7 million and phase two was for the completion of other works that requires for that pavilion to work, as well as electrification, electric wiring, as well as the completion of the ground which cost approximately $9.6 million. So, the total project of Govind Park went up to $13.76 million.

The Ministry of Local Government, Mr. Speaker Sir, will continue to assist the Councils in all these projects as well as ensuring that they assist the Councils in coming with initiatives to broaden their revenue stream, also ensure that they have financial sustainability for all the Councils in the near future. Mr. Speaker Sir, I fully support the motion before the House this afternoon.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker Sir, first of all, I would like to thank the Standing Committee for Social Affairs for the Report and also for the recommendations. Municipal councils are at the front line of service delivery. They are responsible for the everyday needs of our communities, including waste collection, drainage, supportive and safe markets for vendors, maintenance of public parks, and the development of local infrastructure. However, when municipal councils fail to perform, it is ordinary citizens who suffer the consequences.

Having considered the issues highlighted in this Report by the Committee, I believe that we must look beyond identifying problems. We must seriously consider the institutional weaknesses that have contributed to these challenges and, more importantly, put forward practical solutions.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this Report highlights several serious concerns, including financially unstable solid waste collection, unauthorised fees and charges, inadequate drainage, and capital projects being placed on hold because of funding constraints. These are not minor administrative inconveniences. They affect public health, environmental protection, economic activity, and the

inconveniences. They affect public health, environmental protection, economic activity, and the quality of life of our citizens.

On unauthorised fees, I insist that all charges imposed by municipal councils must have a proper legal basis, be transparent, and receive the necessary approvals.

Regarding solid waste management, the Councils must explore more sustainable collection systems, recycling initiatives, improve revenue collection, and appropriate partnership with the private sector.

On sewage and drainage, we must prioritise investment in essential infrastructure. We cannot continue allowing communities to live with overflowing drains, sewage seepage, and recurring flooding.

On supportive and safe markets for market vendors, we cannot continue to see our market vendors selling their produce in environments that are not conducive to their health, safety, and livelihoods. Every effort must be made by municipal councils to provide proper facilities, adequate sanitation, shelter, and other essential services to our market vendors.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I also urge the Government to review all outstanding capital projects and establish clear priorities for completion. Funding constraints must not become a permanent excuse.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on improving public amenities and quality of life, parks and recreational facilities are not luxuries. They are important community assets that provide safe spaces for children, families, senior citizens and young people. I therefore encourage a structured programme to upgrade existing parks, improve lighting and security, provide proper sanitation and expand recreational facilities. Our communities deserve safe, clean and attractive public spaces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude by emphasising that municipal reform must begin with three fundamental principles:

(1) Competent leadership through merit-based appointments.
(2) Accountability through measurable performance indicators.
(3) A motivated workforce through proper job evaluation and fair remuneration.

These three reforms must become the foundation upon which we address the wider financial and environmental challenges facing our municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must stop treating municipal councils merely as administrative institutions. They are important service delivery institutions and must be managed with professionalism, transparency and accountability. People do not judge a municipal council by the number of meetings it holds or the report it produces. They judge it by whether their rubbish is collected, whether trains are functioning, whether sewage is properly managed, whether roads and facilities are maintained and whether their communities are safe.

Good governance is not about occupying positions; it is about delivering results. I therefore urge the Government to move beyond acknowledging these challenges and commit to a clear programme of municipal reform with measurable targets, adequate resources and proper accountability.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion before us in the review of the multiple reports for the Ministry of Local Government and selected town councils.

I think, given my short stint in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I thought I would share just a broad perspective in terms of what I saw during the 10 months I was with the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the major injustices inflicted on all the town councils in the country was when the previous government, or the regime at the time, decided to abolish the democratic election of town councillors, it really destroyed what was a key part of the town councils, which was the empowerment of our citizens in the various towns and localities. (Glitch in the recording) … or in the Town Councils was pretty much a mess. Financial accountability was pretty much non-existent. Project management was very poor, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can see, we are still debating historical accounts, and we are trying our hardest to fix it, to the point now that all the town councils are actually trying to spend money. I saw a request from Nasinu Town Council, they have to spend $300,000 of taxpayers' money to try and catch up or fix the balance of financials that are still outstanding from the Nasinu Town Council. I am sure the honourable Minister for Finance understands the predicament that the Town Council is in, and hopefully we can certainly support, not only the Nasinu Town Council, but all the town councils across the country that are in this predicament.

Apart from those overarching comments, I have to firstly acknowledge the Standing Committee on Social Affairs and its Chairperson for the work that has been done. I have to say, based on the Reports we have been seeing in this House, they are probably one of the most productive Committees in terms of churn of reports, and I would like to congratulate and acknowledge the Chairman and his team. Also, I would like to acknowledge the Ministry officials, Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers, who have provided the necessary information.

Mr. Speaker, given that we have multiple reports, I thought it would be appropriate, perhaps just to touch on common themes across the three or four reports that we are debating here today. The first one is the need to strengthen municipal financial sustainability. For example, the Ministry's review highlighted that municipal rate arrears across the whole Council had accumulated to $71 million over the last 10 years. No matter how you look at it, it is a substantial amount of outstanding revenue that affects Council's ability to fund infrastructure, provide essential services, and respond to the growing needs of the community.

The Nasinu Town Council Report further illustrates this challenge. The Committee noted that the rate revenue collected in 2018 was insufficient to meet the cost of delivery, with a significant proportion of the revenue being utilised for solid waste management and illegal dumping. Similarly, Labasa Town Council estimated a revenue loss of $200,000 following the repeal of the business licencing fees. It is clear that municipal councils across Fiji, certainly, will have to strengthen their municipal collection systems, improve compliance, and explore ways of addressing these tremendous arrears issue that has been happening for some time.

I think, once the execution of the digital transformation pathway gets underway, because of the technology platforms that are being used, we can certainly re-look at the business licence fees, because it was a significant earner for all the town councils, just to help the town councils. I am aware also that some of the town councils have become more innovative, some have looked at reviewing their rate structures, and some have even looked at alternative types of revenue earning

through garbage collection and recycling what can be recycled.

I touch on the second common point, which is waste management and environmental sustainability. The Ministry's Report noted that 13 municipalities have developed solid waste master plans under the J-PRISM II programme. However, the continued reliance on open dump sites remains a challenge. The situation in Labasa is particularly concerning, with the Namara Landfill approaching full capacity. In Nasinu, the cost of solid waste collection and illegal dumping places considerable pressure on the Council's finances. The Tavua Report also identifies the financial unsustainability of solid waste collection services requiring urgent attention.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware that the honourable Minister for Local Government has been placing concerted effort in collaboration with the honourable Minister for Environment to address some of these waste management issues. I am certain that over the next few month, there will be some more announcements made in terms of how we are using our local municipalities to address the ongoing waste disposal problem, particularly when it comes to recycling opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the third common item was infrastructure development and urban planning. Whilst there were a lot of significant projects undertaken to develop townships, namely Keiyasi, Seaqaqa market and bus stand and Korovou urban centre, there was also some concerns over some projects. In this particular Report, there was specific reference made to the Govind Park of Ba project and the Committee noted that project funding had increased from $4.17 million in 2018 to $9.06 million with a total of $13.8 million recorded in July 2026. The Committee has recommended that the Ministry provide a comprehensive report on the utilisation of funds to complete this project and I do support that recommendation.

Finally, there are unique challenges within Nasinu, Tavua and Labasa, as covered in the Report. Nasinu is, of course, Fiji's largest municipality in terms of population and continues to experience significant urban growth. There are challenges infrastructure-wise, et cetera, that need to be addressed.

With Tavua Town Council, we do note that they have similar challenges with wastewater concerns and sewerage. I am aware that plans are underway to fix these, but again, there are challenges, and also, of course, challenges in Labasa and in the interest of time, I will not specifically mention them other than to say, the items such as revenue loss needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, other than those points, I commend the Committee on the hard work in producing this Report. We still have not completely addressed the challenges that we inherited by the previous government, but what I can confidently say, because I was in the Public Accounts Committee for 10 months, that there has been a genuine effort to really fix governance, accountability and other issues in the town councils, particularly when we know that in the near future, we will be holding town council elections, as soon as we come back to form the next government. What we need to be cognizant of is that we need to retrain all our town councillors to ensure that we do not regress from what has been achieved by this side of the House. So, with those few words, I support the motion before the House.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, before I go on to the Report, I want to tell honourable Kamikamica that your justification does not hold any water. To say that the previous government is to be blamed because they have dissolved the elected councils, but let me tell you something, "you have only been in the Public Accounts Committee for a few months, I have been on the ground." Even during the elected Government, already there were these town areas issues – drain problems, road issues, et cetera. Stop this blame game, honourable Kamikamica and move on, please – that is

my humble request to you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to briefly speak on the motion that is before us. Firstly, the Review Report on the 2019-2020 Ministry of Local Government Annual Report, I wish to speak on Recommendation 4.1 on the funding aspect, and in particular, on waste collection. Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have observed, is that some Councils are still struggling to provide service delivery, and that is why there are so many complaints being received from the rate payers. I have said this before and I want to reiterate, and therefore Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to urge the Ministry of Local Government to reinstate the Challenge Fund, whereby councils are assisted annually so that, these councils can carry out these such works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during that review period, major capital works were carried out such as the Laqere Market, Namaka Market, Rakiraki Market, Rakiraki Fire Station, Korovou Rest Room and the list goes on. The time when government bought that land for the construction of the Laqere Market, the idea was, that after the first phase which was to build the market, and then to expand the development so that the Council could generate more revenue, but unfortunately, not much has been done.

The same goes for the Rakiraki Market. The building was designed in such a way that in future, the first floor could be converted into office space or shops, so that the Rakiraki Town Council can generate more revenue. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not much has been done but I urge the honourable Minister for Local Government to look into that.

Recommendation 4.2, I urge the Ministry of Local Government to provide necessary funding to the Ba Town Council for the installation of flood lights so that it is fully completed. I just want to put it on record, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the pavilion with 9,000 seats, rest rooms, changing rooms and other facilities which was completed in 2020only cost $4.1 million. That was during my term because a lot has been said about Govind Park, Bala and all those rubbish. So, I thought that I will put it on record and after that, that $9 million that they are talking about was spent under the current Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during our meeting with officials from Ministry for Local Government, we were told that Cabinet has endorsed the MOU between Fiji Roads Authority and the municipal council for the maintenance of footpath and streetlights. I ask the honourable Minister to update us on that as well. And if it has happened, that is good for the Council because it has been done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Review Report of the 2018 Nasinu Town Council Annual Report, during our meeting with the Nasinu Town Council a few months ago, we were told that there is a plan by the national government to build the new hospital at the Valelevu Ground. And to our complete surprise, we were made aware that Nasinu Town Council was not in favour of this development, and they gave some genuine reasons such as traffic congestion, negative responses from the general community and the loss of their recreational land. So, I ask the Government to review this subject matter, which is very important to the people of Nasinu.

On Recommendation 4.2, I urge the key line ministries to please coordinate so that the ratepayers do not suffer, because of the blame game by each ministry. The authorities mentioned are Fiji Roads Authority, Water Authority and Waterways. These are the key Ministries that deal with municipal councils and they play a major role in the upkeep of our municipality. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no point in declaring towns and cities, when we cannot even provide the basic services to our ratepayers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Review Report on the 2020 Tavua Town Council Annual Report, Recommendation 4.1 - the Ministry of Local Government must oversee the operations of municipal councils. They should follow the Local Government Act in carrying out their responsibilities and duties, so that there is no claim or lawsuit against the Council. The reason why I am saying this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Tavua Town Council has been charging fees without fees being gazetted. It is a serious matter.

On Recommendation 4.4 - the Tavua Town Council must be supported in terms of funding, so that they can relocate their municipal market, bus stand, and carrier stand to a new location where the Housing Authority has given an offer letter to Tavua Town Council for this proposed development. This is a long-standing matter for the Tavua Town Council and for the people of Tavua. I humbly request the honourable Minister to assist the Council so that they can have a new municipal market, bus stand and carrier stand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, on the Consolidated Review Report on the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Labasa Town Council Annual Report, Recommendation 4.2, I want to ask the honourable Minister whether there is a plan to relocate the Subrail Park. The reason why I am asking this is that a few weeks ago I was in Labasa and was told that there is a proposed relocation plan. May I ask the honourable Minister, where will the relocation going to take place, whether any feasibility study has been carried out, and what is the timeframe for the new proposed relocation programme?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are told that currently there is much cost involved in maintaining the pavilion and upkeep of the ground. We all aware that Subrail Park is the only major sporting facility in the North and they need all our support.

Recommendation 4.4, Labasa Town Council was provided $50,000 grant for the purpose of service delivery to Rotuma, Dreketi and Seaqaqa. This $50,000 was only for the inspection. The biggest question is, who is responsible for the funding for the collection of garbage and other services in those areas?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government needs to wake up because our towns and cities are the face of our country. Some general comments, Navua has been declared a town. Unfortunately, no town administrators have been appointed, and I am reliably informed that the Lami Town Council is still providing the required service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand by what I am saying. My quesiton is, when will Navua have their own administrators and CEOs? It is almost four years. I have just told you, you better stop this blame game, honourable. I respect you. If you are going to continue, then I will start disrespecting you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Nadi Town to be declared a city, I am not against the intentions. In fact, some years back we also had the same intention, but after consultations with the ratepayers and the people of Nadi we had to hold back that intention because there were some pressing issues that Nadi was facing during those days and even today. One is the flooding issue. The other issue is the roads, footpaths, traffic lights and many more. At that time when we were talking about declaring Nadi as a city, we were told that we do not want Nadi to be named as Nadi Flood City, so we stopped at that point in time. So, I humbly request the honourable Minister to revisit those issues. If those matters can be resolved and are in place, we will support Nadi to be declared a city.

HON. I. S. VANAWALU .- The Committee noted all the positive and negative contributions made by the honourable Members during this debate on the review report ahead of us. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Local Government and the staff for their

commitment and sacrifice during this review period.

We also thank the Special Administrators, the Chief Executive Officers, and the staff of the Nasinu Town Council, Tavua Town Council, and Labasa Town Council for their usual commitment, dedication and support provided to the people in their respective municipalities. On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the motion before this House.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Secretary-General has suggested that we now take a break. However, we have only one item remaining in the Order Paper, and that is the Annual Report of the Consumer Council, with only two speakers from either side. So, I suggest we power on without a break to the end. Unless I hear violent objections from the floor, no, I will take it that you agree to my proposal.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI 2020-2021 AND 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. I. S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

> That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2020-2021 and 2023-2024 Annual Reports which was tabled on 29th September, 2026.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU .- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to present the Committee's review of the 2020-2021, 2023-2024 Consumer Council of Fiji Annual Reports. Consumer Council of Fiji is a statutory body established under the Consumer Council of Fiji Act.

The Act empowers the Council to promote and protect the interests of consumers for goods and services in Fiji. The Council operates as a public service and advocacy body rather than a profit-driven or commercial entity. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs identified the following key issues in its review of the Annual Reports.

First, the Consumer Council of Fiji relies heavily on government grants and donor funding whereby current funding levels are inadequate to support and expand the Consumer Awareness Programme's outreach activities, vehicle procurements and staffing needs.

Second, consumer complaints increased significantly from 3,545 in 2020 to 2021 to 5,406 in 2023-2024. Hence, the key complaint areas were the landlord and tenancy disputes, food and beverage complaints and online shopping and e-commerce scams.

Third, the absence of dedicated legislation creates difficulties in resolving issues such as illegal eviction, rental disputes, bond refund issues and lack of tenancy agreements.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the recurring hygiene and food safety issues in restaurants and eateries where stronger enforcement measures are needed, again there are repeated

offenders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to strengthen the performance of the Consumer Council of Fiji, the Committee recommends that increased government funding will be provided to provide adequate budgetary support to enable the Council to expand the Consumers Awareness Programme, strengthen regional outreach, procure operational resources and recruit additional staff.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the Consumer Council of Fiji Act will enhance the Council's power, including stronger enforcement mechanisms and greater authority to address consumer rights violations. The Committee also believes that introducing dedicated landlord and tenancy legislation will address rental disputes, illegal evictions, bond-refund issues, tenancy agreements, and unreasonable rent increases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee notes the significant contribution of the Consumer Council of Fiji in advocating for consumer rights and addressing consumer grievances during the reporting period. Despite operating under resource constraints, the Council has continued to provide essential services, consumer education, and dispute resolution mechanisms for all the people of Fiji.

The increase in consumer complaints reflects both growing consumer awareness and evolving challenges faced by consumers, particularly in areas such as tenancy disputes, online transactions, food safety, and service delivery. These emerging issues underscore the need for a stronger, responsive, and adequately resourced consumer protection framework.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you have ten minutes each. At the end of the debate, we will have the mover, the right of reply.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs concerning the 2020-2021 and 2023-2024 Annual Reports of the Consumer Council of Fiji. At the outset, I acknowledge the work undertaken by the Standing Committee and its Members in examining the Council's performance, achievements, and challenges. I also acknowledge the Council's management and staff for their continued efforts to protect consumers across our beloved country.

Consumer protection, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not simply about resolving complaints between buyers and sellers. It is about protecting the rights, welfare, and the financial security of ordinary Fijians. It is about ensuring that families receive value for their hard-earned money, businesses operate fairly, and consumers have somewhere to turn when their rights are violated. For many families, every dollar matters, whether purchasing groceries, paying rent, meeting transport costs, or obtaining essential services, people need affordability, fairness, and accountability.

Parliament must not treat this Report as another routine annual reporting exercise. We must ask what its findings mean for consumers and what must change. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most concerning findings is the growth in consumer complaints, although there are positives to that as well.

The Committee recorded 3,545 complaints in 2020-2021 compared with 5,506 in 2023-2024. That is an increase of a total of 1,861 complaints, or approximately 52 percent. We should be careful not to assume that every additional complaint represents worsening conduct; greater awareness and reporting may also contribute. Nevertheless, these figures demand attention. They tell us that thousands of consumers are seeking help with problems that they have been unable to resolve themselves.

The Council has also delivered measurable results. According to the report, it resolved 3,058 complaints and recovered approximately $3.59 million for consumers in the 2020-2021 period. In 2023 and 2024, it resolved 3,747 complaints and recovered approximately $4.06 million. These are meaningful outcomes for ordinary people, but the increase in complaints has outpaced the increase in resolved cases, and Parliament should ask whether the institution has the capacity to keep pace with demand. We should require regular reporting, not only on complaints received, but on outstanding cases, resolution times, and the results achieved after referrals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council's work must be considered against the financial pressure experienced by households. The price of food, transport, housing, and other essentials has a direct effect on family wellbeing. A consumer who has little disposable income is particularly vulnerable to misleading pricing, defective goods, unfair contract terms, and unexpected charges. During the Committee hearing, officials discussed monitoring supermarket prices following fuel price increases. They were careful to distinguish the limited basket of monitored goods from the broader cost of living pressures already experienced by households.

That distinction matters, and a narrow survey that finds no significant increase in selected products over a short period cannot be used to dismiss the lived experience of families whose overall costs remain high. The Government, therefore, must listen to both the data and the people. I urge stronger publication of accessible price monitoring, especially for basic household items, and clear explanation of the action taken when unfair practices are identified.

Another serious issue is the absence of dedicated landlord and tenancy legislation. The Committee highlighted complaints involving rental increases, bond refunds, tenancy agreements, and unlawful evictions. In its evidence, the Council described families being locked out of their homes and utilities being disconnected. These are not merely commercial disagreements; they can put children, elderly people and vulnerable households at immediate risk.

The Committee has recommended that the responsible ministry expedite the proposed Landlord and Tenancy Bill, and I support urgent attention to this recommendation. Any framework must be balanced. It should protect tenants from arbitrary treatment while recognising the legitimate rights of landlords. Written agreements, transparent bond handling, reasonable notice requirements, and an accessible dispute resolution process would give both sides greater certainty. The Government should advise Parliament where the proposed legislation stands and provide a credible timetable for its consideration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report also identifies recurring hygiene and food safety problems in restaurants and eateries. The evidence presented to the Committee included disturbing accounts of poor storage, pests, and unsafe food handling practises. Consumers should be able to purchase prepared food without fearing that basic hygiene standards have been ignored. Council can investigate, alert, and refer, but effective deterrence requires prompt action by authorities with enforcement powers. The Committee recommends closer work with the Ministry of Health and stricter action against food safety violations. I will go further in asking for coordinated inspection programmes, transparent follow-up on repeat offenders, and public reporting of compliance outcomes. Food safety cannot depend solely on consumers making complaints after harm has occurred, prevention and consistent enforcement must be the priority.

Consumer risks are also changing. Online shopping and e-commerce scams are specifically identified among the major complaints. The Committee evidence indicates that the collapse of the eBay-related scheme contributed significantly to the 2023-2024 increase. Digital platforms offer convenience and opportunity, but they also create new ways for people to lose savings and personal

information. Public education, therefore, must keep pace with these risks.

Consumers need practical advice on identifying fraudulent offers, verifying sellers, protecting their accounts and reporting suspicious activity. Perhaps the most important institutional issue is that the Consumer Council of Fiji cannot itself fine or prosecute offenders. It relies on bodies such as the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), the Land Transport Authority (LTA), the Fiji Police Force and relevant health authorities. This division of responsibility may be appropriate, but it must not become a gap through which complaints disappear. I hope that this can be addressed and taken seriously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the report offers a clear agenda. The Consumer Council of Fiji has shown that it can recover money, resolve disputes and educate the public. Its work deserves recognition, but the same report exposes shortcomings that cannot be resolved through goodwill alone, legislative gaps, limited enforcement, fragmented information, insufficient resources; and growing consumer risks.

I therefore call on the Government to provide Parliament with a time-bound response to the Committee's six recommendations, particularly the:

- proposed tenancy legislation;
- review of the Consumer Council Act;
- stronger food safety enforcement; and
- adequate resourcing for outreach and staff retention.

We should also receive regular updates on complaint outcomes and inter-agency referrals. Ultimately, the test of consumer protection is not how many reports are tabled or how many meetings are held; it is whether an ordinary Fijian who has been treated unfairly can obtain timely, practical and effective redress. This is the standard against which our institutions and this Government should be judged. I thank the Committee for their work.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to acknowledge and commend the work of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in its comprehensive review of the Consumer Council of Fiji's annual report of 2020 to 2024 and also for the recommendations aimed at strengthening the council's operation. I support these recommendations and acknowledge the Council's efforts in responding to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Ministry of Finance's perspective, the Consumer Council of Fiji plays a vital role in protecting consumer rights, resolving public grievances, and promoting fair business practices. Effective consumer protection is essential to safeguard household welfare, purchasing power, ensure value for money and strengthen public confidence in our marketplace. These efforts help ensure that every consumer is treated fairly and with respect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the figures presented in the report demonstrate the growing demand for the Consumer Council's services. While complaints increased, resolutions and recovery cases increased as well. A good example was in 2024, when around $4.6 million was recovered for consumers. This is a meaningful result for households that might have otherwise been left to bear financial losses. The increase in complaints also highlights the importance of ensuring that the Consumer Council has the capacity to respond effectively.

The Committee's recommendation for Government to provide the council with adequate funding to cater for consumer education and awareness programmes and rural and maritime

outreach.

Staffing and employee retention are recognised and Skilled and experienced staff are essential to provide timely advice, resolving disputes and conducting effective consumer awareness programs. To support these efforts, any requests for additional funding should be guided by clear assessment of operational needs, priorities and expected results, ensuring that public expenditure translates into better services and practical benefits for consumers, while maintaining fiscal discipline and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a clear legislative framework is equally important. The recommendation to review the Consumer Council or Fiji Act should be considered with a view to ensuring that the Consumer Council can fulfil its mandate effectively. Any changes should clearly define its responsibilities and powers, strengthen accountability, and avoid duplication with other agencies. Mr. Speaker, Sir, stronger consumer protection also requires close cooperation between the Council, the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), Ministry of Health, Land Transport Authority and other relevant authorities. Effective referral, information sharing and coordinated action, can help ensure that complaints lead to timely and appropriate responses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, landlord tenant disputes remain a significant concern, particularly where rental bonds, rental increases and eviction notices place pressure on households. The proposed Landlord and Tenancy Bill provides an opportunity to clarify the rights and responsibilities of both parties and support fair rental arrangements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Report also draws attention to food safety, online shopping scams and unfair business practice. And these issues affect both household finances and public well-being. Addressing them require cooperation with agencies such as the Ministry of Health, which is responsible for inspection, investigation and enforcement, supported by practical advice that helps consumers identify risks and seek assistance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, consumer protection must reach beyond our urban centres. I support the recommendation to strengthen awareness and outreach in rural and maritime communities. Consumers should have access to reliable information about their rights, regardless of where they live or the language they speak. The Committee's review provides a useful basis for strengthening the Council's operation and wider consumer protection framework. The priorities are clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, improve institutional capacity, clarify responsibilities and strengthen cooperation, so that consumers receive timely support and effective redress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Council staff for their contribution and thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its work. Our shared objective must be a fair and trusted marketplace, supported by responsible public expenditure and accountable institutions.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the Consolidated Review Report covering the 2020-2021 and 2023-2024 Annual Reports of the Consumer Council of Fiji, listed as Parliamentary Paper No. 125 of 2026.

As a Member of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I thank our Chairman and fellow Committee Members for their work on this review. I also acknowledge the Chief Executive Officer and Management Team of the Consumer Council of Fiji for their submissions and continued service to consumers throughout Fiji. The Consumer Council is a statutory body established under the Consumer Council Act, and plays a critical role in protecting consumer rights, resolving disputes, promoting consumer awareness, and advocating for fair market practices. The reports demonstrate that the Council

continues to perform strongly, despite financial constraints, limited resources, and staffing challenges.

The Council relies mainly on government grants and donor-supported projects, while government funding increased from approximately $1 million during the pandemic period to $1.4 million in 2023-2024, inflation and rising operational costs continue to place pressure on its resources. Employee costs remain the largest expenditure because consumer advocacy, mediation, and complaint resolution are labour intensive functions.

Despite these limitations, complain volumes increase significantly. Major complaints involve landlord and tenancy disputes, food and drink issues, public transport services, online shopping scams, and electronic goods. These figures reflect the increasing pressure consumers face from the higher cost of living, inflation, and growing digital fraud. Importantly, the Council delivered real outcomes. It resolves thousands of complaints and recovered more than $3.5 million for consumers during 2020 and 2021, and more than $4 million during 2023 and 2024. Its advocacy also contributed to significant policy outcomes, including the establishment of a Financial Service Ombudsman, the National Anti-Scam Taskforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted that greater consumer awareness remains necessary particularly in rural, remote and maritime communities. Many consumers remain unaware of their rights and available redress mechanisms. I therefore strongly support the recommendation of expanded multilingual awareness campaigns through radio, community outreach and digital platforms.

The Committee also noted the Council's limited enforcement powers. The council cannot prosecute or impose penalties and must rely on agencies such as Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), Land Transport Authority, Fiji Police Force and Municipal Councils. Strengthening collaboration and referral mechanisms between agencies will improve consumer protection outcomes. As a personal recommendation, consideration should be given to introducing a secret shopper programme to complement existing market surveillance activities. Such a programme could assist in identifying service delivery, shortcomings and support the work of the enforcement agencies.

The Committee further noted recurring hygiene and food safety concerns in restaurants and eateries. Stronger enforcement and penalties against repeat offenders are necessary to better protect public health. Tenancy disputes also remain among the most common complaints. Expediting the proposed Landlord and Tenancy Bill would provide clearer protection for both landlords, tenants and assist in resolving disputes more effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Consumer Council continues to deliver exceptional value to consumers despite resourceful strength. I fully support the findings and recommendations contained in Parliamentary Paper No. 125 of 2026.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report for the Consumer Council for the years 2020 to 2021 and 2023 to 2024 Annual Reports. Once again, I do acknowledge the work of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs under the Chairmanship of honourable Vanawalu, together with his Committee Members on the examination of the reports. Also, I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the Chief Executive Officer of Consumer Council, Ms. Seema Shandil and her hardworking team who have in my view been working very hard since I started dealing with them when we got into office.

In terms of those statutory institutions that report into the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Consumer Council is quite exceptional in terms of what it endeavours to do with the small budget that

gets given to them. I agree with the previous speakers that consumer protection is of course fundamental to the fair, transparent and competitive economy. It is not simply about addressing complaints when customers around the country experience difficulties, but it is about ensuring that every Fijian regardless of their income, their location or their circumstances, are treated fairly when purchasing goods and services.

The Committee's Report obviously highlights several achievements that deserve recognition. Of course, in between the reporting periods, the complaints result increased from 3,058 in 2020-2021 to 3,747 from 2023-2024. They recovered approximately 3.9 million for consumers in the first reporting period and over 4 million in the second. These represent more than just institutional performance. It represents money returned to households, individuals and families who sought assistance and redress. Also, one of the areas of strength for the Council, is its endeavor to provide policy submissions through what they are seeing on the ground. It was noted in the report that their policy submissions jumped from 10 in the first reporting period to 22 in the next reporting period.

Since my interactions with them, the Consumer Council, I know that for a while people were joking about the number of task forces that our ministry was setting up. I am quite glad that the Committee has identified those task forces in their review. In this case, I will speak specifically about the National Anti-Scams Taskforce and the National Food and Safety Taskforce. Both these task forces emanated from situations arising on the ground. After the eBay scam was reported about two and a half years ago, the Council, together with RBF and other regulatory bodies, decided to come together to try and address the rising scams in the country.

From those initial meetings, the Cabinet is about to receive a report or a Cabinet paper which will hopefully identify all legislative changes required to give our regulators, including the police, more teeth to actually prosecute those who are involved in these untoward and unacceptable activities such as scams. Also, the National Food and Safety Task Force was created we received a tremendous number of complaints from imports received which were cheap but, I have to say, were probably not even fit for a dog to consume. So, again, we formed the task force to actually try and address those issues.

I am pleased to report that, through the work that we did, there has been collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health has been reviewing their food safety standards and there will once again be a flurry of legislative or reform amendments. These will include some amendments on the side of the regulators as well, to just put a bit of fire into how we regulate and monitor imported goods, particularly those that are clearly inferior. On top of that, in that task force, there was focus on inferior food products displayed on shelves around the country. It is no secret that some shops turn off their fridges when they close, then turn on the fridge when things open. Mr. Speaker, there is a concerted effort to address all these kinds of issues, to ensure that the quality of food that our people are consuming is not only good quality, but also being maintained properly, or kept properly.

Mr. Speaker, finally, before I sit down, the Committee talked about the Landlord and Tenancy Bill. That Bill is actually in circulation once again with us, and hopefully we can bring that forward soon. In terms of food and hygiene, as I had mentioned, honourable Speaker, the work that has been done in conjunction with the Ministry of Health should, one, make sure that our food is kept safely and one of the other pleasurable outcomes, Mr. Speaker, from the exercise that was done, that there are a lot more cross-collaboration between the health inspectors who are based in the town councils together with FCCC and the Consumer Council in monitoring, the supermarkets, shelves, etcetera. Just to ensure that food safety remains paramount in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the final perhaps, note, to acknowledge is, I guess at some point, given the great work provided, done by the Consumer Council, there may be perhaps a need for more budgetary support,

perhaps a bit of self-funding mechanisms, maybe to actually try and resource the Consumer Council and the FCCC to ensure that, we are properly monitoring the food and everything else that our consumers use, because it is very important, honourable Speaker, that as our economy continues to grow, we ensure that at the very heart of our governance as a country that we are ensuring that we are protecting our consumers, we are receiving fair goods for a fair price, and also the quality of the goods are of acceptable quality. So, with those few words, I am pleased to lend my support to the Consumer Council Reports of 2021 and 2024.

HON. I. S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the Committee noted the constructive contribution made by honourable Members during the debate on this review report of the 2020-2021, 2023-2024 Consumer Council of Fiji's Annual Report. Sir, I will take this opportunity to thank the Chief Executive Officer and the staff of the Consumer Council of Fiji for the commitments, dedication, and support provided to the people of Fiji. On that note, Mr. Speaker Sir, I fully support the motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting. I thank you all for your contributions. Have a peaceful evening - rest well. The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.29 p.m.