

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**MONDAY, 28TH APRIL, 2025**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes ... ..	598
Communications from the Speaker ... ..	598-599
(1) Welcome	
(2) Year 10 – Yat Sen Secondary School	
(3) Australian High Commissioner to Fiji	
(4) Responses to Written Questions	
(5) Coca-Cola Games	
Presentation of Papers & Certain Documents ... ..	599-600
Ministerial Statements ... ..	600-616
(1) Impact of US Tariff on Fiji – Hon. M.S. Kamikamica	
(2) Progress of the Emission Reduction Programme – Hon. A.V.B.C. Bainivalu	
(3) 2025 Fiji Secondary Schools National Athletics Competition – Hon. A.M. Radrodoro	
(4) Conference of Pacific Education Ministers Meeting 2025 – Hon. A.M. Radrodoro	
Questions ... ..	616-630
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Progress on the Reconstruction of Vatuwaqa Primary School (Q/No. 15/2025)	
(2) Effect of US Tariff to Fiji’s Trade Prospects (Q/No. 16/2025)	
(3) Fiji and China TVET Support Programme (Q/No. 18/2025)	
(4) Road Conditions from Savusavu to Labasa (Q/No. 19/2025)	
(5) \$300 Million Grant for Vanua Levu Road Projects (Q/No. 20/2025)	
(6) Continuous Procurement of Normal Saline (Q/No. 21/2025)	
(7) Fiji’s Compliance to ICAO Security Audit 2023 (Q/No. 22/2025)	
(8) Strategies and Initiatives - India’s Tourism Market (Q/No. 23/2025)	
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Students Who Benefitted from TSLs Assistance (Q/No. 25/2025)	
(2) Update on Ministry of Waterways Projects (Q/No. 26/2025)	
(3) Redeployment of Funds - 2024-2025 Budget (Q/No. 27/2025)	
Work Care Bill 2025 ... ..	630-631
Accident Compensation (Amendment) Bill 2025 ... ..	631
Review Report – Ministry of Civil Service 2021-2022 Annual Report ... ..	631-640/641-645
Suspension of Standing Orders ... ..	640
Consolidated Review Report – Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2019-2022 Annual Reports ... ..	645-655
Consolidated Review Report – Nausori Town Council 2026-2028 Annual Reports ... ..	655-665



## MONDAY, 28TH APRIL, 2025

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

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs,  
Civil Service, Public Enterprises and Information

Hon. Graham Everett Leung, Attorney-General

Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and  
Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for  
Trade, Co-operatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications

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

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

Hon. Charan Jeath Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

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

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

Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Minister for Justice

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodoro, Minister for Education

Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster  
Management

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

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

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

Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports

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

Hon. Vatimi Tidara Tuinasakea Kaunitawake Rayalu, Minister for Agriculture and  
Waterways

Hon. Viliame Naupoto, Minister for Immigration

Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Minister for Policing

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu, Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Assistant Minister for Finance

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

Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

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

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

Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Aliko Bia, Assistant Minister for Information

Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu, Assistant Minister for Justice

Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva, Assistant Minister for Transport and Infrastructure

Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa, Assistant Minister for Health

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya

Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu

Hon. Sachida Nand  
Hon. Shalen Kumar  
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu  
Hon. Jone Usamate  
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya  
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar  
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau  
Hon. A.A. Maharaj  
Hon. Hem Chand  
Hon. Vijay Nath  
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand  
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma  
Hon. Viam Pillay  
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo  
Hon. Virendra Lal  
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu

Absent

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs  
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala  
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal  
Hon. 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 Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2025, 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**

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast on television and the internet.

Year 10 - Yat Sen Secondary School

Honourable Members, please join me in warmly welcoming the Year 10 Social Science students and teachers of Yat Sen Secondary School. Welcome to your Parliament. I hope this visit will provide valuable insights to the working of Parliament and deepen your understanding of its role in our democracy.

### Australian High Commissioner to Fiji

Honourable Members, it is with great pleasure that I invite you to join me in extending a warm and heartfelt welcome to His Excellency, Peter Roberts, the newly appointed Australian High Commissioner to Fiji.

Your Excellency, today, marks the beginning of yet another chapter in the enduring and deeply rooted friendship between Fiji and Australia. As our nations continue to strengthen these ties, we are confident that under your leadership, especially your vast experience in the Asia-Pacific region, this friendship will flourish even further, creating new opportunities, collaboration and growth.

Your presence in Parliament is a testament to the importance of diplomatic engagement and cooperation between our two countries. We look forward to working closely with you to advance our shared interests, to deepen our people-to-people connections and ensure a future that benefits both Fijians and Australian alike. On behalf of the Fijian Parliament, we warmly welcome you.

### Responses to Written Questions

For the information of honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 45, the Secretariat has received the written responses from:

- (1) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation to:
  - (i) Written Question No. 270/2024 asked by the honourable T.N. Tunabuna; and
  - (ii) Written Question No. 290/2024 asked by the honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua.
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics to Written Question No. 9/2025 asked by honourable J. Usamate.
- (3) Honourable Minister for Justice to Written Question No. 10/2025 asked by honourable F.S. Koya.

### Coca-Cola Games

Finally, I wish to congratulate Marist Brothers High School and Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School for winning this year's Coca-Cola Games. You have done exceptionally well, and I also congratulate all the other schools and athletes who had participated.

Your dedication, perseverance and sportsmanship have been truly inspiring for others. To those who secured victories, well done, and to everyone who competed, you have proven that hard work and passion are true hallmarks of greatness.

## **PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS**

HON. S. L. RABUKA Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I, with your permission, also acknowledge His Excellency, the new Australian High Commissioner, and also the students of Yat Sen Secondary School, named after a great fellow who is recognised in both sides of the strait, the late Dr. Sun Yat Sen. Welcome.

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

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

- (1) Fiji Airports Annual Report 2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 161 of 2024*)
- (2) Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Annual Report 2021-2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 135 of 2024*)
- (3) Ministry of Education Annual Report 2022-2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 109 of 2024*)
- (4) Fiji Police Force Annual Report August 2020-July 2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 97 of 2021*)

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji – Audit Report on Statutory Authorities, Independent Bodies and Commissions (*Parliamentary Paper No. 184 of 2024*)

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

Sugar Cane Growers Council Annual Report 2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 145 of 2024*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

Nasinu Town Council Annual Report for the Year 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 3 of 2025*)

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

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

- (1) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry; and
- (3) Honourable Minister for Education, who will deliver two separate statements.

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

Impact of US Tariff on Fiji

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament; I rise today to address this august House on the recent imposition of new tariff by the United States (US) Government. I will provide an overview of the evolving situation, our Government's proactive response, the strategic steps we are undertaking to safeguard the interests of our exporters, uphold the livelihoods of our people, and preserve the integrity of our bilateral trade ties whilst broadening out further trade relations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2025, the President of the United States declared a national emergency in response to ongoing trade imbalances; with the United States trade deficit reaching US\$1.2 trillion in 2024. As part of this declaration, a tariff policy was announced through an Executive Order introducing a baseline tariff of 10 percent on all imports into the US effective from 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2025.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 57 countries were identified as having significant trade surpluses with the US and were subjected to higher individualised tariffs ranging from 11 percent to 50 percent which was to take effect from 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2025. Fiji was included in this group and was assigned a tariff of 32 percent on its exports to the US. However, on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2025, the US

Administration then subsequently announced that a 90-day suspension of tariff beyond the baseline of 10 percent applies to all countries, including Fiji.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the tariff rate imposed on Fiji is 10 percent. That means, for the next 90 days, our exports to the US will only be subject to the baseline tariff of 10 percent. The suspension will conclude on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2025, after which the original tariff structure will be reinstated unless further actions are taken.

The US has been Fiji's number one export destination, accounting for approximately 20 percent of all goods exported. In 2024, the total value of Fiji's exports to the US stood at US\$439.08 million, while imports from the US amounted to US\$425.03 million, resulting in a trade surplus of US\$62.7 million for Fiji.

Some of Fiji's major exports, as we know, include bottled water, kava, turmeric, cane sugar, seafood, fish, high-quality mahogany and smaller quantities of various agricultural products, such as taro, ginger and a variety of high value-added fast-moving products, consumer goods. Those products are highly regarded in the US market, and their presence reflects the diverse nature of products that Fiji offers. What is particularly important to emphasise is the complementary nature of these exports.

Fiji products do not compete with US goods, rather they complement them. That means, rather than facing direct competition, Fiji goods are filling a niche in the US market, offering American consumers a broader range of high-quality options.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, behind those exports are thousands of livelihoods in Fiji. Over 18,000 smallholder farmers rely on the kava industry. More than 5,000 farmers depend on ginger, turmeric, and skincare value chains, and approximately 11,000 farmers are engaged in the sugarcane industry.

A recent survey conducted by our Trade Commission in North America in response to the proposed tariff found that for some of our businesses, particularly those in fresh turmeric, kava, ginger, and skincare, the United States represents 100 percent of their total export market. In fact, around 70 percent of our key exporters derive 60 percent of their revenue from the US market alone. Those statistics, Mr. Speaker, Sir, emphasise just how critical the US market is to the success of Fijian exporters, and by extension, the livelihoods of thousands of Fijian families.

Fiji is not just an exporter to the US, we are also a growing active importer of American goods, with significant potential to deepen this trade relationship further. The economic reality is that Fiji lacks the production capabilities or scale of industrial capacity like the US. As such, we rely on high-quality American goods, technology, and components to support our domestic industries and everyday needs.

In 2024, Fiji imported from the US, as mentioned, US\$425 million, covering a wide range of sectors. These include machinery, electrical and electronic equipment, vehicles, aircraft parts, and other transport-related equipment. Imports also comprise the pharmaceutical products and medical instruments, food and agricultural products, chemical inputs, along with textiles, footwear and apparel, demonstrating the breadth and depth of American exports that support Fiji. Many of those US exports already enjoy duty-free or low duty entry into the Fijian market.

I would like also to highlight that approximately 72 percent of all US goods imported into Fiji enter duty-free. For the remaining imports, tariff rates are generally low and facilitative. About 25 percent of US goods are subject to a modest 5 percent duty, while only a small portion of around 3 percent face higher duties, ranging from 15 percent to 32 percent.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, on a weighted average basis, the average tariff on US imports stands at 1.8 percent, and of course, if one looks at Fiji's exports or in other words the US imports from Fiji in proportion to total US imports which amounted to. US\$4.1 trillion in 2024, our proportion is merely 0.0001 percent. As such, whilst the position of the People's Coalition is that we understand the desire of the US to impose tariffs, we seek proportionality fairness, and reasonableness.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has not been resting on its laurels but has acted swiftly and tactically in response to these developments. Our response has been measured, strategic and coordinated, aimed at minimising potential disruptions to our exporters. As part of our diplomatic outreach, the Ministry immediately reached out to the US Ambassador to Fiji, Her Excellency Mari Damour on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025. This meeting allowed us to raise our concerns directly with the US Mission at the earliest stage and seek an audience with the US Trade Representative (USTR) as a matter of urgency.

The USTR, Mr. Speaker, is the US agency that is responsible for US's international trade, commodity and direct investment policies and negotiations. At the meeting with Her Excellency, we focussed on attempting to gain a clearer understanding of the intention and underlying rationale behind the proposed tariffs. The discussions were held in the spirit of partnership, with the view to preserving the momentum in our bilateral relations over several years but clearly articulating the adverse implications of tariffs on the Fiji economy and our exporters, most of which we know are our hardworking farmers in Fiji.

Following this, the hardworking trade team led by the Permanent Secretary, engaged swiftly in meetings with senior officials at the office of the USTR. Over the last two years, Mr. Speaker, we have been cultivating some strong relations with USTR, and this has helped greatly as we sought an urgent meeting with the Ambassador of the USTR. Last Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025, a high level meeting occurred between myself and the USTR Ambassador, His Excellency Jamieson Greer. The meeting was positive, with both sides reaffirming the longstanding Fiji/US relationship and expressing a commitment to deepening trade cooperation.

Ambassador Greer acknowledged Fiji as a good faith trading partner and has proposed several areas of cooperation. We have both agreed to task the senior officials to advance technical discussions and maintain momentum towards a mutually beneficial outcome. The senior officials' negotiations are expected to occur soon, and I am confident that we should be able to agree on a way forward well before the 90-day window closes.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure that our discussions and responses are grounded in the lived realities of our exporters, the Ministry through the Fiji Trade Commission in America undertook a targeted survey to assess the potential impact of tariffs. This outreach involved Fijian exporters across diverse industries and sectors including agriculture, food, and beverage, skincare, and fisheries. The objective was to capture both immediate and long-term effects on their operations, market access, supply chains and relationships with smallholder farmers who are integral to Fiji's export economy. The findings drawn from the written submissions and follow-up conversations have provided critical insight into sector-specific vulnerabilities and are helping change an evidence-based strategy and our case to the USTR.

In addition, Sir, we also have engaged with some of our very close regional partners in particular, Australia and New Zealand in terms of furthering these direct discussions. In order to finalise discussions, we are working closely as well with the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) in preparation for upcoming negotiations.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, well before the tariff action, Fiji has been progressively broadening its trade relations in the last 24 months with all its development partners. The approval of the Interim

Economic Partnership Agreement (IEPA) with the European Union (EU), which will provide access to the EU market under global sourcing provisions. We have reopened our discussion with Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus and more recently, discussions are underway on a regional economic partnership agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which are just a few of the examples that we are working on at the moment, including potential membership at Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government will spare no effort in ensuring that the interest of Fiji and its exporters, many of whom are micro, small, and medium enterprises are protected, supported and empowered so they continue to thrive. I urge honourable Members of this House on both sides, to stand in solidarity with our farmers, exporters and support Government in its ongoing efforts to engage the United States in good faith with a shared aim of securing a fair and enduring outcome for our people.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for his Ministerial Statement, and he can be rest assured that he has our support in trying to ensure that the right thing happen with respect to the trade with Fiji. But there are some questions, Mr. Speaker, that need to be answered, and one of the most important questions is why is it that it took a little longer to react when we knew this was going to happen? Our mission ought to have been on to it prior to the announcement being made. It was a delayed reaction, and urgent meetings had to be called, especially in light of the fact, that the trade balance with the US lies in our favour. It always has been and that is attributable to Fiji Water who exports a large amount of water to the US. There are less imports that actually come from the United States into Fiji.

Also, I understand, 90 days has been given. I think there was an announcement that was made by the honourable Prime Minister in the media around 3<sup>rd</sup> April, where he stated they will have to make some tough decisions on how we trade and who we trade with. These are important comments made by the honourable Prime Minister following the imposition of the US tariffs and 63 percent is the tariff that was proposed on exports to the US. What is going to happen to our exports of Fiji Water is a question that the Government needs to be able to answer. These are things that need to be answered.

The other thing also, the honourable Prime Minister said, and I quote, “The world is bigger than the US”. So, I am assuming he is backing that up with, “Alright, we can open up some more trade with some other countries”, and I hope honourable Prime Minister that we have some discussions along those lines with Singapore. That is a market that we still have not really tapped into with respect to those diversified products that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is talking about because we all know that Singapore literally imports everything from all around the world, and I think we do not send much out to them at all. It is a huge market for us.

I know for this much, Sir, that they do not even need trade agreements. It is literally very easy to get in there, so long as Biosecurity lines are clear, and I think we have established a lot of protocols and pathways into Singapore already. We need to make use of that to find some kind of balance with respect to these tariffs.

It is very important for Fiji at this stage, the critical stage that we do this, at breakneck speed, especially in light of the fact that, as I said right at the outset, the balance is in our favour. Losing that would be huge for Fiji and it is Fiji Water that is actually going to suffer. We are, in fact, in the Pacific, one of the biggest losers when it comes to the rest of the Pacific Island countries if these tariffs that currently are suggested with respect to Fiji.

I understand we had about US\$366 million-plus worth of goods going to the US and coming in was about US\$158 million or thereabouts. As I have said, there is fish, there are exports of kava, I know one particular kava exporter, who has done extremely well out of it and his turnover runs into millions. These are people who are going to get affected.

Some of our products are actually the best in the world and you are talking about ginger. I know there were some research done with respect to our ginger. Our organic ginger is rated at 500 percent times more powerful than any other ginger. That is not coming from me, that is actually coming from the person who owned Fiji Water previously, who had it tested. You can ask the former Minister for Agriculture and the current Leader of the Opposition, he will tell you the same, that these are products that need to be taken to different markets. I am hoping that the honourable Prime Minister will travel a whole lot more to get more out of the markets that we know we can establish into. The United Arab Emirates, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister mentioned, we have our support in getting this done, in order to ensure that we actually end up in a better position.

With respect to the actual tariffs, it may be that we might end up in a global recession and because of that, we might benefit in terms of getting lower prices for fuel, etc. However, what we would really like to know, honourable Deputy Prime Minister for Trade, is there a forward moving plan with respect to this? Have we got confirmed markets? I know there is a question to the honourable Prime Minister a little later on in the week along the same lines, but those are the questions that remain. I hope we are able to resolve this as quickly as possible.

#### Progress of the Emission Reduction Programme

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my statement on the progress of the Emission Reduction Programme (ER-P) in Fiji. The Ministry of Forestry has been actively and tirelessly advocating and promoting the sustainable forest management concept since the early 1990s but have been continuously challenged by the increasing need for land for agricultural development, infrastructure and settlement, which are the main drivers for forest clearing. A key barrier to the adoption of sustainable forest management has been our inability to provide an income stream to landowners as an alternative to natural forest extraction and other land-based developers.

Mr. Speaker, with the ER-P, we now have the ability to provide an alternative income stream through the monetizing of established carbon stocks as an incentive for adopting good husbandry practices, and is also expected to bring about the changes in the adoption of more contemporary approaches and innovations, but more importantly, the positive change in human behaviour towards the environment and the use of the forest and land resources.

In January 2021, the Fiji Government, on behalf of the people of Fiji, signed an Emission Reduction Payment Agreement contract with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) which is managed by the World Bank, covering Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni. Under the contract, Fiji is to establish 37,282 hectares of forest capable of sequestering 2.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

In return, Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) will make result-based payments amounting to a total of US\$12.5 million, which is equivalent to FJ\$25 million, based on an agreement term from July 2019 to December 2024 on the following reporting and verification periods, from:

- 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020, 300,000 emission reduction units;
- 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2022, one million emission reduction units; and
- 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024, 1.2 million emission reduction units.

As we speak, a development of a national framework for monitoring, reporting, to support the verification of the net level of greenhouse gas emission from within the forest and land-based sectors has been completed. The assessment of net emissions for the period beginning from 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020 has been conducted, and the monitoring report has been audited by an independent third party.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report records a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 922,828 tonnes of carbon dioxide, equivalent and is an aggregate of the emission reduction units generated by the monitored programme and activities that caused the change in forest cover, which are:

- (1) The reduction in rate of deforestation by 82 percent. That is the total removal of natural forests and the conversion of the area to other forms of land use, example, agriculture, road infrastructure and establishment of new settlement areas, to name are few. This reduction generated 493,887 emission reduction units.
- (2) The reduction in rate of forest degradation by 16 percent. These are activities, extractive or destructive in nature that affect the integrity, structure and health of the natural forests and lead to the removal or destruction of wood fibre, example logging operations for timber production and forest fires in pine plantations, which are the two main activities monitored. This reduction generated 115,583 emission reduction units.
- (3) A noted improvement in the management of operations of the government-owned forest-based companies, that are the Fiji Pine Limited and the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited. On aggregate, both companies retained more forest plantation area than what was harvested for timber production purposes, generating a total of 293,618 emission reduction units.
- (4) The contributions and impact of the reforestation and up-forestation work to rehabilitate degraded areas through the community-based tree-planting programme under the Ministry's Rehabilitation of Degraded Forest Programme and the Global Pledge of 13 million trees in 15 years. Between 2019 and 2020, an area of 2,224.96 hectares was replanted, which generated 19,739 emission reduction units.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Emission Reduction Payment Agreement with the Carbon Fund for the Forest-Carbon Partnership Facility which is the current carbon trade agreement endorsed by the Government, the 922,828 emission reduction units recorded for the first monitoring period account for 37 percent of the total contract volume of 2.5 million emission reduction units.

The total recorded 922,828 emission reduction units will be transferred and traded to the Carbon Fund, which will first require the securing of leases over forest areas that have contributed to the recorded emission reduction units. The work to secure these areas under leases will begin by May 2025, when the beneficiary registry will be finalised. The preliminary figures indicate that there is an estimated 8,000 land units anticipated to be involved in the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the transfer and trade of the 922,828 emission reduction units will unlock a total payment of US\$4.6 million, which is equivalent to FJ\$10.2 million. Under the approved beneficiary mechanism, the beneficiaries will receive 80 percent, which is US\$3.7 million, equivalent to FJ\$8.2 million. The remaining 20 percent will be retained by the Fiji Government. That is 5 percent

as a buffer fund and 50 percent as its administration cost.

The final monitoring report, which covers the assessment period from January 2021 to December 2024, will be submitted for auditing by October 2025. This final report will record how well the activities and operations within the forest and land-based sectors have been managed towards achieving the remaining 1.6 million emission reduction units.

The Climate Change Act 2021, in particular Part 10, was to provide the legal provisions for the transfer and trade of the emission reduction units. However, given its current status, an alternative pathway for the transfer and trade has been proposed, which is now before the Government lawyers. This process has been delayed and is now expected to be finalised by late April to early May of this year.

In brief, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pathway proposes the use of the land lease agreement arrangement as the legal document to register and transfer the emission reduction units. In terms of the Emission Reduction Partnership Agreement and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Carbon Fund, it will end on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025. If all domestic processes are completed as scheduled, then the following transfer and trade of the emission reduction units will happen:

- (1) By June to July of this year, a total of 323,161 emission reduction units should be traded, which accounts for 35 percent of the total emission reduction units recorded for the first monitoring period, which amounts to US\$1.6 million, an equivalent of FJ\$3.6 million. The units traded are for Fiji Pine Limited, 131,668 emission reduction units; Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited, 161,950 emission reduction units; and under the Director of Lands, State Schedules A and B, which is 29,543 emission reduction units.
- (2) By December 2025, a total of 135,322 emission reduction units should be traded, amounting to payment of US\$676,610, an equivalent of F\$1.5 million. The units traded are for:
  - the sustainable management of natural forests, which will cover 115,583 emission reduction units; and
  - community tree planting, which will cover 19,739 emission reduction units.
- (3) By the end of December, a total number of emission reduction units expected to be traded is 458,483 units, which accounts for 49.7 percent of the total emission reduction units recorded for the first monitoring period, amounting to a total of US\$2.3 million, equivalent to FJ\$5 million.
- (4) By the end of December, the auditing for the second and final monitoring report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2024, would have been completed, and the emission reduction units generated for this period would have been known.

It is most likely that the list of beneficiaries registered for the first period would also qualify to receive payment for the final period, unless there is a significant reduction in the forest carbon stock initially registered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it should also be noted that there is a possibility of a further extension to the term of the FCPF Carbon Fund, but this is only applicable to countries that have shown significant and consolidated progress in the securing of lease titles and its subsequent transfer to the carbon fund. The process is dependent on how efficiently the leasing process is implemented and completed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ER-P is best suited for a small island developing states like Fiji for the following reasons:

- (1) Fiji has all the hallmarks for establishing a forest carbon trading platform to support the nation's development programmes, and these are that emission levels from its forest and land-based sectors are insignificant compared to global trends. Fiji is blessed with a sound forest carbon stock resource base from its natural tropical forests and pine and mahogany plantations, which capably meets our timber needs. There is also an existing national framework for governing the forest and land resources, which includes the national registration system and documented ownership and land titles.
- (2) Fiji is provided a unique opportunity to learn first-hand about the forest carbon trade business and to test the robustness of our national programme framework in terms of its accuracy, consistency, and the level of compliance under a third-party auditing process to verify and validate the following conditions:
  - (i) Social safeguards, that the welfare, equity, rights, aspirations, and intellectual properties of indigenous people, resource owners, and other forest-dwelling communities are protected and safeguarded, and that all grievances and issues are reported or addressed.
  - (ii) Environmental safeguards - that the natural landscape approach is promoted for the development and management of the forest and land resources, whilst forging towards the achievement of sustainable development goals, low emission development strategy goals, and net zero by 2050.
  - (iii) Sectorial level all policy and legal frameworks and arrangements governing forest and land resources are adhered to and followed, and that all good hospitality practises are promoted, implemented, and documented.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that Fiji is one of the 15 countries that have taken the bold step to record, report, and publicise its national net emissions over the last five years under the FCPF Framework. In doing so, Fiji's forest sector will enter into an era of unprecedented attention in terms of investment and sustainable financing, bilateral arrangements and market opportunities, and the rippling high-tide effect of other sectors, for example, tourism.

- (3) The forest-based carbon trade arrangement is designed to incentivise government to implement programmes that ensure the reduction in the rate of deforestation and degradation and sustain the remaining natural tropical forests as forest carbon sinks. While the nuance is to promote the establishment of alternative forests, plantations, sources for timber needs, of which Fiji has made significant advancement in this area, with the timber industry and trade market based primarily on the performances of Tropic Pine and Fiji Mahogany as leading contributors to the sector's GDP.

It should be mentioned that timber production sourced from the natural forests will continue, but this will be done through a sustainable approach which involves the reduction of removable volume per area and the immediate replanting of harvested areas, and both of these regimes will be conditioned, instituted through the harvesting licences issued.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2025-2026 Financial Year, the Fiji Pine Limited, and the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited will receive further funding support under the Deforestation of Degraded Forests Programme. This move is expected to bring about positive changes that will lead to improved performances and results, compared to the past practices in which quality was often compromised for quantity for the following reasons:

- (1) A greater number of trees in an area can be planted in a year and the achievement of 30 million trees in 15 years planned can be achieved earlier than planned and in doing so safeguards and secures Fiji's timber source.
- (2) An improvement in achievements in terms of survival, area coverage and forest rigour are assured under a plantation programme that has been tested and proven.
- (3) The increase in area planted each year addresses the core sequestration objective of the Emission Reduction Programme in terms of maintaining and enhancing carbon sinks.
- (4) It should be noted that community-based tree planting programmes will continue to be supported but at a reduced scale, focused on the more modest and localised needs. For example, the food and food security, fuel, wood and energy needs, protection of water catchment and repairing systems. Any inspiration for establishing community-based wood lots for timber production needs will be channelled through the scheme framework and will be supported under the government grants provided to the Fiji Pine Trust and the Fiji Mahogany Trust.

It is worth mentioning that the review of the Mahogany Industry Development Act 2020 is also very timely, as it will hopefully allow the mahogany industry to return in totality to the forest sector and to a governance and management framework that ensures its growth and expansion in terms of development, including the resource owners and contribution to emission building.

The Emission Reduction Programme has the potential to support the national carrier, Fiji Airways, under the carbon offsetting and reduction scheme for international aviation. The co-share units are recognised as the gold standard units that attract premium carbon prices, and so work is currently being conducted to meet this standard.

The carbon resource-based payment provides an alternative and sustainable financing, an income source for village communities to support their development programmes and priorities. The Ministry is working with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, provincial offices, the provincial administrators, the iTaukei Land Trust Board and the Ministry of Lands in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Emission Reduction Programme provides information and improves our knowledge about our natural forests, trees, wildlife and the importance of its ecological services and products. The Ministry will develop an education curriculum that will suit all levels of training, including primary school level.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first, I wish to acknowledge the Government through the Minister responsible for forestry on the ministerial statement made this morning concerning the progress of the Emission Reduction Programme. It is a very challenging issue and particularly because of so many factors, including cross-cutting issues that have implications on the issue itself.

First, I think we are dealing with an extractive industry. I was in Vanua Levu recently and visited one of the key players in the Labasa economy, Valebasoga Tropik Board. I was quite worried with the low volume of timber coming to be processed. That is one side of the challenge. And we have the issue about climate change that I will probably just speak on within the limited time that I have. I will try and focus on a few areas and then look at the environmental and economic benefits versus social issues as well. I wish the Government all the very best.

That work from 2021 needs continuation, and thank you for the reports and, of course, our

close linkage to FCPF and the monitoring reports are so important. Hopefully, we will come to realise the benefits that will trickle down to the landowners. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is part of our responsibility in the global efforts, to reduce global gas emissions.

As we are all aware, the two main components are mitigation and adaptation. That is part of the mitigation process, and more mitigation now means less adaptation in the future. But for us as small island vulnerable country, adaptation is about survival as well and we need to have a balance and look at our priorities well.

Partnerships are so important. The Emission Reduction Programme is so important for us, given our mitigation efforts, and the honourable Minister has talked about the implementation of the Climate Change Act 2021, particularly section 10. If I remember correctly, Article 6 of the Paris Agreement specifically talks about such, and the honourable Minister for Finance is well aware of the complications in this particular area, given the funding constraints or non-committal. Of course, huge programmes need to be funded through these initiatives.

It is important for us as well, particularly as a Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to look at the balance when we look at the three pillars of sustainable development - economic development, social development and environmental protection. We have just come back from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Sir, and the focus was on social development and justice.

Let us not focus only on the economic benefits, but our environmental protection is so important. While on that, this is about biodiversity and I wish to, again, encourage all of us to support every programme that involves biodiversity, particularly when we talk about ecosystem diversity, species diversity, genetic diversity and even functional diversity because part of that is our forest, when it comes to biodiversity, and it affects our water, food and the quality of life as well.

I think the other important issue that I wish to raise with the limited time is about pricing of emissions. Again, this is a key issue that was discussed in the global stocktake prior to COP28, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly coming together, bringing the developing countries' needs rather than looking at the difference, particularly in the level of emission. Let us just look at the common interest and come up with the solution and a framework that will look at the pricing of carbon as was discussed in COP28.

Lastly, on new funding arrangements. I think while we are reliant on the global climate fund and so many other sources of funds, in the negotiations a lot of encouragement is given back to the countries, parties, Paris Agreement to look at ways of incentivising, coming up with new mechanisms so that they can also fund their own initiatives and programmes.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is an appropriate time to suspend our proceedings for morning tea. Before we do, I kindly invite His Excellency the High Commissioner, Peter Roberts, to join the honourable Prime Minister and our Members of Parliament for morning tea. Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.33 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the TL100 students of the School of Law and Politics from the University of the South Pacific. Welcome to your Parliament, and I hope you will learn more on how your Parliament works this morning.

### 2025 Fiji Secondary Schools National Athletics Competition

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise today to give a short brief to this august House on the successful 2025 Fiji Secondary Schools' National Athletics Competition. We witnessed remarkable improvements in this Games through a collaborative partnership and as part of the Ministry's commitment towards Sustainable Development Goal 4. This is part of lifelong learning and sports, as we know, which has also become an employment opportunity for our students, especially professional sports.

First and foremost, I join you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to convey my congratulations to Marist Brothers High School, Suva Grammar School, Queen Victoria School, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School, Adi Cakobau School and Natabua High School for their excellent performances during this tournament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to take this time to congratulate all the athletes who travelled from the maritime zone and the other education districts, nine of them under the Ministry of Education. Their participation contributed to the success of this sporting event. I would also like to congratulate the school management committees, parents, guardians, coaches, managers, heads of schools, teachers and well-wishers of these participating schools.

I also convey my sincere appreciation to the team from Samoa and the lone student who came from Australia to participate in our Fiji Secondary Schools Athletics Competition. Over the three days of competition, all of us witnessed the remarkable display of talent, perseverance and sportsmanship of over 2,000 student-athletes who represented 160 secondary schools around Fiji in the track and field event this year. A total of 179 secondary schools around Fiji, 160 were represented at the Games. We hope to see some of these student-athletes representing Fiji in the Pacific Mini Games in Palau later this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to acknowledge the sponsors for recognising and rewarding the second and third place getters in the Girls and Boys Divisions. The monetary reward is the outcome of a series of meetings with the sporting bodies whereby concerns have been raised on the commercialisation of students during the organised sporting events. For the first time, monetary rewards have been given to schools that have attained second place and third place in the Boys and the Girls Division. All heads of schools have been informed that at least a minimum of 50 percent of the prize money must be shared with the student-athletes who participated and their coaching panel.

That incentive is a return, valuing their sacrifices and commitment. I also wish to acknowledge the families, parents and guardians of these students, some who made the sacrifices to sell *yaqona*, food or raise money as communities to be able to support parents and students to make their way to the Games. We thank you for the commitment to the holistic development of your children. Sports is always a character-building event and helps in the long run in the discipline of the child and their personal ability to overcome challenges they may face in life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to share with this august House the impact of planning and collaborating with relevant organisations. The Laucala HFC Stadium was a safe and drug-free arena

during the three days, given the event was a drug-free one. *Vinaka vakalevu* to the Fiji Police Force for providing that much needed security as their presence in the three-day sporting event made a huge difference. Also, to the Ministry of Health, their presence during the three-day event and advocating on free HIV testing at Laucala is also commended.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, appreciation is also extended to the Land Transport Authority for ensuring that the public transport was safe, and loud music was not played – eliminating the unruly behaviour. As the Minister for Education, I am grateful for the partnership that ensured that we, as a government, are proactive in providing a safe space through sports for our young people of today.

The unity noted in the three-days of sports with no major incidents occurring indicates that the children, parents, guardians, old scholars and the Fijian community are recognising that the development of children is a shared responsibility. On that note, I acknowledge the schools who came from rural and maritime zones, particularly those who won medals. The sharing of the medals across Fiji is giving us hope that access to equitable education is progressing well, and irrespective of where you live, you can be a champion if you set your mind on it and work hard towards achieving your heart's desire.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture I am appealing to this august House to come on board and support the Ministry of Education in other sporting events that will take place in Term 2, and have it as another drug-free event in sports including: hockey, basketball, swimming, soccer, netball, cricket, volleyball, rugby league and the big one, which is the Dean's Competition.

The Fiji Secondary School Athletics Competition celebrated and ended its golden jubilee on a high note, as this event was again declared a safe and drug-free event.

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the honourable Minister for Education on the updates of the Coca-Cola Games, as per the Ministerial Statement. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Marist Brothers High School and MGM for winning the 2025 Coca-Cola Games. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the successful completion of the event, all those who were involved in organising the event including the teachers, I acknowledge their hard work. A big *vinaka vakalevu* to all organisers and participants.

Like any event, it is always good to look at the pros and cons and I hope the organisers will take my critics in a positive manner to further improve the Coke Games next year. It is always good to look at the history while dealing with any event and I must remind this august House, in the last term of Parliament, some of the Members now sitting on that side, basically Government Members, wanted to change the name of Coca-Cola Games.

I hope honourable Lynda Tabuya remembered that discussion in this Parliament in trying to change the name of the game when the then FijiFirst Government opted to ban all high sugar content and carbonated drinks in schools. So, no carbonated drinks, no sugar containing products were allowed to be sold in schools and it was suggested that the name “Coca-Cola” Games needed to be changed in order to match the policy that was going on in school at the time.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is, now they are in authority, they have the power, do they have the guts to put their money where their mouth was in trying to change the name of Coca-Cola Games.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hogwash!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- That is what we were tell you that time, unfortunately, you did not listen. It is not the games, that is why I was specific, update on Coca-Cola Games, as per the

Ministerial Statement. Change the heading of the Ministerial Statement.

Mr. Speaker, I hope, the Government now realises the importance of sponsorship in co-ordinating events at such a high magnitude; it is very important. I would like to thank Coca-Cola for coming on board and sponsoring these kinds of events which was very successful and allow us to look for new talents come the near future to represent our nation.

It was also noted and a well-known fact, that drugs is now sold and utilised in schools. I wonder, if random drug test through parental consent was done, and if not, should we be looking into that in next year's games to parental consent because we do not want to put our athletes who are not into drugs at a disadvantage, comparing to those who are doing drugs in school or outside school and competing at the Coca-Cola Games. We need to have a standard and it is very important that we need to introduce this at the Coca-Cola Games as well.

Mr. Speaker, another serious concern raised was about the late finishing of the Games as some kids reached home late at night, while missing of kids is on the high, safety should be given equal priority as the success of the Games. It will only take one such unfortunate event to ruin the spirit of Coca-Cola Games. We need to prioritise on these small logistics which can bring a huge blunder to the Games. We also note that some schools are having 1<sup>st</sup> term exams in their schools this week, as we speak. How can we expect our students to prepare for the exam this week while Coke Games just ended last week? The honourable Minister for Education needs to coordinate better in future where the Coke Games is held during the last week of the 1<sup>st</sup> Term so that student do their exams, enjoy or participate in Coke Games followed by two weeks of school break.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, I urge that Fiji is a sport loving nation. A lot of talents where at show during the Coke Games. The Ministry of Youth and Sports should pick on those talents and support them to build for the Pacific Games and Commonwealth Games leading up to Olympics. Most of these talents go missing after high school. The Ministry of Youth and Sports needs to step in and ensure that we do not lose these talents to drug abuse or loss of interest in the game.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I ask the honourable Minister to make his second statement, I did take time out to go and attend the Coca-Cola Games, very early on Friday morning. I was the first to sit in, waiting for the game to begin.

I happened to be wearing my favourite colour - yellow, which was my QVS colour, and the Leader of the Opposition knows that it was also my RKS colour. But I did not realise that I was seated where the parents of the Suva Grammar School were going to congregate - the parents, including some of the spouses of the Members of Parliament present here. I managed to blend in with the Suva Grammar School crowd to (my yellow) for the rest of the day. I think the parents did not realise that I was there to support another school.

(Laughter)

#### Conference of Pacific Education Ministers Meeting 2025

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide a brief to this august House on my recent Ministerial engagement at the Conference of Pacific Education Ministers 2025, which was held in Papua New Guinea (PNG) from 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 to 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2025.

The highly anticipated the second CPEM meeting officially commenced on Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2025, in Port Moresby, marking a historic moment for education in the Pacific region. Education Ministers and Delegates from 18 nations gathered to address political challenges and chart

a course for transformative education under the theme, ‘Transforming Education for a Better Pacific’.

I also had the opportunity to champion the roundtable discussions on Transforming Education through Flexible Learning Pathways, and during my keynote address, I emphasised on the initiatives, such as the:

- Entrepreneurial Skills Training by incorporating TVET skills training in teacher training;
- Implementation of micro qualifications;
- Mainstreaming of TVET at Year 9 in 15 secondary schools with TVET centres;
- Citizenship and Financial Education; and
- Matua Programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I highlighted that education is the cornerstone of our future. By working with our Pacific neighbours, Fiji can build a stronger and more resilient education system that empowers young people and drives sustainable development throughout our region.

This conference was built on CPEM 2023, and reaffirmed commitments to strengthening national and regional education systems in a sustainable manner. Ministers were cognisant to Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The purpose of CPEM 2025 aims to bring together Pacific Education Ministers to address regional challenges, develop policies, and enhance our education system. It focusses on inclusivity, teacher development and regional cooperation to ensure sustainable, equitable and high-quality education for all Pacific learners.

Along with the Fiji Delegates and Officials from the Fiji Embassy in PNG, a series of bilateral meetings were held with key development partners, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

The goals of those meetings was to strengthen partnership and explore how these organisations can better support Fiji’s education system in line with SDG 4, the National Development Plan 2025-2029, Vision 2050, the 2023 Denarau Declaration and the 2025-2027 PNG Declaration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising education as central to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the Pacific Education Ministers reaffirmed the need for collective efforts to deepen regionalism. The Pacific Ministers further committed to CPM's role as a political oversight mechanism for regional education collaboration. They emphasised that regional cooperation remains essential to addressing shared educational challenges, while ensuring national systems are robust and responsive. The Education Ministers recognised significant concerns and priorities that will need to be addressed collectively with the support from regional agencies, education partners and stakeholders to strengthen national systems, including the provision of flexible learning initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, inspired by the innovation and resilience of Pacific navigators and way finders, the Ministers highlighted the importance of balancing national priorities and efforts to deepen regionalism. Education must equip learners with the skills to navigate challenging landscapes while preserving and protecting Pacific identities, cultures, knowledge and systems.

The Ministers reaffirmed the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) in short, as a unifying mechanism for policy alignment, shared learning, climate-resilient systems and sustainable education transformation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on the outcomes of CPEM 2023 held in Auckland, the three-day Conference drew together a diverse range of views and opinions where the following key issues and actions were identified:

- Support to teachers in the region: Ministers, along with all other education sector groups who attended the CPEM, agreed to prioritise supporting and strengthening teacher quality.
- Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Language: We recognise the importance of strengthening resilience of learners from Pacific identity, culture, arts, and languages. That needs to be incorporated in the education policies and legislation.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and ICT: Ministers acknowledged the need to explore ways to embrace AI and ICT to support education outcomes.
- Inclusive education: The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to inclusive education and children with special needs, ensuring those most vulnerable and gifted are appropriately catered for.
- Early Childhood Education: We acknowledge the critical contribution to foundational learning outcomes of culturally and spiritually relevant, and inclusive and quality early childhood education and development through PacREF and the Pasifika Call to Action on Early Childhood Development.
- Vocational Training and Pathways: Ministers called for investment and collaboration in piloting and implementing relevant contextualised and cost-effective models of Vocational Education and Training in schools in the region.
- Intersect between Education and Health Outcomes: Ministers highlighted the need for collaboration with the health and relevant sectors to ensure support for health and wellbeing in schools.

The Pacific Education Ministers acknowledged the update of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the Review of Regional Architecture and welcomed the decision of their Leaders for the inclusion of education as a standing agenda item in their annual Forum Leaders Meeting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recommendations outlined for Fiji includes adopting the 20 priorities outline in the PNG Declaration for Transforming Education 2025-2027, to create a better Pacific with emphasis on strong political support for education and sustainable development.

A significant bilateral meeting took place with Dr. Edward and the World Bank representatives. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity to review ongoing World Bank-funded education programmes and to discuss key priority areas for future collaboration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also engaged in constructive side meetings with the Asian Development Bank to discuss key educational issues and priority areas for collaboration in the 2025 CPEM in Port Moresby. Discussions encompass a wide range of topics, including cyclone proof infrastructure for schools, National TVET Policy and Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Further bilateral meetings were also engaged with UNESCO, GPE and COL. Discussions focussed on addressing critical educational challenges and fostering innovative solutions, as well as

Fiji's ongoing efforts to improve educational outcomes through strategic investments in teacher training, curriculum development and digital learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian community and the Fijian High Commissioner in PNG hosted the Fiji delegation during our stay in Papua New Guinea. The Fijian diaspora expressed their sincere appreciation for the delegation's visit and reiterated their commitment in supporting Fiji's development.

The CPEM 2025, provides a crucial platform for Pacific nations to collaborate on transforming education for a better future in the region. With a focus on key priorities such as inclusive education, teacher development and regional cooperation, the meeting will work towards achieving educational goals and ensuring the alignment of efforts across the Pacific.

A key outcome of the meeting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the endorsement of the PNG Declaration 2025-2027, which outlines 20 priority areas for implementation over the next two years, guiding the region's educational progress. The three-day Conference, hosted by PNG, is the first Pacific Island nation representing a significant step towards strengthening collaborative efforts to enhance educational outcomes across the Pacific.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Education for providing an update on the Conference of Pacific Education Ministers Meeting which was held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG). Meetings and conferences are vitally important because it expands knowledge and gives opportunity to learn new trends and developments in the field.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Education Conference of Pacific Education Ministers is vital since education is not merely a tool for individual success, it is the cornerstone upon which societies are built. It empowers individuals to rise above circumstances, fosters innovation and propels economies, and instils values that shape responsible citizens. An investment in education is an investment in the future of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a conference on education provides a pivotal platform to bring together educators, policy makers, researchers and community leaders. It serves as a collaborative space to address challenges, such as access to quality education, teacher training, equitable resource distribution and the integration of technology into learning. Those issues demand urgent attention as they significantly impact the opportunities available to our youth, the leaders of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, such conferences allow us to learn from global successes and tailor solutions that meet the unique needs of our nation, particularly in fostering inclusive education for rural and marginalised communities. I am sure the honourable Minister for Education has gained a lot of good information and developed new skills which will help him to carry out his duties more efficiently. I am sure the information gained from the Conference will definitely motivate the honourable Minister for Education to deliver effectively. We hope to see some new policies which will benefit the students at ECE level, special inclusive education, primary, secondary and tertiary level, and the Education Sector at large.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, education conferences are not only about discussions, but they are also catalysts for action. They spark initiatives that strengthen our education systems and ensure that no child is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, attending conferences overseas comes at a cost. I am sure the taxpayers' money will not go to waste. I am sure the honourable Minister will share ideas with stakeholders and

bring about the much-needed changes in the Education Sector.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, kindly note that Oral Question No. 17 of 2025 on today's Order Paper will be dropped, as the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications has addressed the issue in his Ministerial Statement this morning.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### Progress on Reconstruction of Vatuwaqa Primary School (Question No. 15/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the progress of the reconstruction of Vatuwaqa Primary School which was destroyed by fire in December 2022?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the simple answer to the question by the honourable Member, the discussion is progressing well.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request the honourable Minister for Education to provide a detailed progress, as far as the reconstruction of Vatuwaqa Primary School is concerned, which was destroyed in a fire more than two years ago in December 2022. We are now in April 2025.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, there has been a lot of discussions in this august House about Vatuwaqa Primary School, and we also share the same concern. As the last advice in this august House, the Ministry of Education is trying to contact the trustees of the Vatuwaqa Primary School. It is run by a trustee, run by a management, so the Ministry of Education will have to get their consent before we can initiate any work, and update you on the progress in terms of reconstruction.

We have sought legal advice from the Solicitor-General's Office regarding the delay undertaken by the trustees of the school, which the Ministry of Education is trying to resolve as soon as possible - the legal aspects in terms of the conditions of the lease, the breach by the current trustees in terms of the lease, that I have already alluded to, that it is progressing well.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- In schools, we often see that the schools are destroyed by fire or natural disaster. I would like to ask the minister is there are any policy in place to ensure that schools are protected from fire and natural disaster? For e.g., during our time we had this policy in place where schools could use part of the money to insure the building. Have you made any changes to the policies, or the policies are still intact?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education has already implemented new policies regarding the disaster management of respective schools. We have set up a Disaster Risk Resilient Department in the Ministry of Education to look after any disaster that is confronting schools at the various districts, at the various divisions. We have those.

In terms of utilisation of the Free Education Grant, the responsibility is still with the management of the schools, and we have encouraged schools, if they have not utilised sections of the Free Education Grant, they can write to us so that we can collaborate and discuss on better utilisation

of those unutilised education grants.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the Minister for Education, yes, many schools get destroyed by fires and other climate change as well. Disasters that are precedented and unprecedented. A question to you, honourable Minister, is, have you considered going forward that schools get insured? Is there any sort of insurance plan or ideas to go forward so that the burden of these challenges do not come on government and taxpayers going forward?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I always admire the questions that has been raised by the honourable member. I hope it is not AI-generated. The school's authority is with the management of the school or the faith-based organisation. We provide the free education grant based on six allocation, and they can discuss with us should they wish to explore those opportunities.

Effect of US Tariff to Fiji's Trade Prospects  
(Question No. 16/2025)

HON. L.D. TABUYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the net, direct and indirect effect of the US tariff announcements made by the Trump Administration with respect to Fiji's trade prospects?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable member for her question. Just by way of background, Mr. Speaker, the partnership by the IFC with the Government of Fiji has been in existence for quite some years now and the deepening of that relationship was started by the previous government, which has led to some very good initiatives over the last few years. The recent one being the current initiative that is happening in Vanua Levu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during COVID-19, IFC also played a pivotal role in Fiji's economic resilience. They provided the technical expertise, advisory services and helped craft policies to try and ensure that over that difficult time, Fiji was not only able to sustain livelihoods and preserve jobs, but also paved the way for a robust recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the IFC Agreement, it is not a new Agreement, which had been used to pursue some of the initiatives that I have just mentioned. In essence, the Agreement captures the intents of the current Government and is an extension of what has been happening from the previous government, which is an endeavour to continue to look at investment laws, enhance regulatory efficiency and support attraction of quality investments into the country, which obviously translates into real jobs and economic opportunity.

One of the areas of interest why we are quite keen to get this Agreement in place is, tomorrow I will be delivering some remarks on a certain issue regarding digital strategy, as part of developing digitisation in the country, it is very important in terms of government services, that a lot of time is spent looking at the existing processes. It is termed as and the experts call it, process re-engineering. It is always a good precursor before one enters digitisation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one main motivation behind the re-signing of the Agreement is to particularly pursue, those Ministries that are keen to begin the digitisation process. It is free of charge and will allow us to start progressing all Government services in terms of digital transformation and digital technology. There will be a technical advisor who will support the Ministry in terms of what we wish to do. It is a very useful and effective Agreement. It was used to come up with some of the initial

digitisation initiatives that are currently underway.

I remind the House that I have talked about starting a business process and the current work on business permit approvals that is now already in existence, in conjunction with the honourable Minister for Local Government. These things came out of this IFC Agreement, which is a very good Agreement in terms of how we wish to progress in critical reforms, particularly in the digitisation space.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, could you just enlighten us with respect to the assistance being given to MSAF under this particular programme?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regard to the MSAF assistance, as far as I am aware, that was used for the restructure, rebranding and a few other initiatives of MSAF. As I understand that assistance has concluded, but the Agreement is being pursued this time around, particularly to focus on some more reforms, such as investment reforms and the digitisation journey that the country is about to embark on.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of prioritisation, is there any specific sector or market segment, given the need for us to broaden our economic base? I know that there are many competing priorities. Would you elaborate more on that, honourable Deputy Prime Minister?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is no secret that right now there is a laser focus on commercial agriculture and aquaculture in terms of private sector engagement. The honourable Leader of the Opposition will be aware that FIJI Water is actually on the ground now in Fiji acquiring land for commercial agriculture. The exciting thing about that initiative, Sir, that it will lead to commercialisation of some of our crops, because they have expertise in trees, looking at mango, papaya, for import replacement, and then for export.

In terms of aquaculture, hopefully, we are setting up a project very soon to focus on scaling up our prawn industry. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the prawn industry in Fiji imports \$21 million per annum and growing. These are the plans that are in place. I would just like to address that remark because it reflects the inaction on that part of the House. In fact, when you come to think of it, some of the initiatives that we have undertaken in two years, or less than two years, they never did it. With due respect to the other side of the House, it is their inaction that has led this side of the House to do what we are doing at the moment.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as I had previously advised, the third oral question for today will be dropped from the Order Paper as it has been addressed in the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

Fiji and China TVET Support Programme  
(Question No. 18/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the progress of discussion for the Fiji and China TVET support programme?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, since my visit to China in 2024, the Ministry has been in close consultations with the People's Republic of China through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a bilateral agenda, discussing the development of Fiji's TVET programmes and scholarship

for students who wish to further their education through high-quality vocational training at the Tianjin Luban Workshop, as it will foster people-to-people cultural exchange.

Teacher upskilling and training at the Luban Workshop, bringing advanced teaching models and high-quality equipment for our vocational curriculum can all be cultivated through the Ministry of Education digitalisation platform.

Training through the village TVET model of craftsmen's skills and provide entrepreneurial skills tailored into the village enterprise context. The discussion on strengthening the TVET sector is in its initial stage. It will be further explored in exchange for cooperation that will deliver tangible results, targeting skills, capability improvement for students, teachers and villagers in rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's Embassy and the PRC is actively working with relevant authorities to identify other vocational models from the Luban Workshop Chinese initiative for international vocational training. The Ministry of Education is taking a targeted holistic approach with the Chinese Government in developing and improving basic technical and vocational skills of students and teachers.

The Ministry of Education is confident, through its partnership, that we will be able to identify the most relevant TVET model in China that would have the largest impact on our local context. We have been working collaboratively with the Chinese Embassy in Beijing, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to shape proposals in alignment to the needs of the Ministry of Education.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for his answer to the question and we look forward to the developments that arise out of that. Just before asking my question, I would like to also congratulate Dr. Eci Naisele, who has been appointed as the Director for Higher Education Commission - a person who has a lot of experience in terms of vocational training at TPAF and at other places.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand that the Ministry is currently developing the TVET policy. I would like to understand what you are learning from China and how is that being instilled into this TVET policy? As we all know, TVET is the big thing that we are worried about in this country. How are these things working together in terms of what is being learnt from China, and the developments that are proceeding on the development of the TVET policy?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, all I can say is that the TVET policy is currently being taken around for consultation purposes. Perhaps, suggestions from the honourable Member can be included or taken into account in the TVET policy, and that will be much appreciated.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his response and what he said earlier that he compared my question to an AI-generated question. Thank you. It is just that the Opposition is good enough to hold the Government accountable. The question with this partnership is, what role does this partnership play in Fiji's broader economic diversification and workforce development plans?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, it is still in its initial stage and the impact is what we are probably relating to, that we intend to not only have the TVET policy, but also be an option for economic generation activities and eliminate poverty. Related poverty alleviation programmes can be offered to students in schools and also at the village level.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, now that we have China helping us with the TVET Support Programme and students will be going to TVET, my simple question to the honourable Minister, is the Ministry considering to cease the support given to Pacific Polytech with a \$5 million grant given every year?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope that is not another AI-generated question. That is a totally new question.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- I will rule that out of order.

Road Conditions from Savusavu to Labasa  
(Question No. 19/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the condition of the road from Savusavu to Labasa?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, some parts of the road have, of course, deteriorated and I acknowledge that it has become noticeable. The challenges faced include prolonged unfavourable weather conditions which have significantly affected road maintenance and construction works.

The Government has allocated a significant budget to Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) for the improvement of road infrastructure and its maintenance works across the country. That includes road maintenance which are in progress in Labasa, Seaqaqa, Savusavu, including the alternative route from Savusavu along Buca Bay to Natewa West Coast and further towards Korotasere, Nayarabale, Wainikoro and the Labasa route.

Works are in progress for Savusavu to Labasa via Nabouwalu Road and the Transinsular Road. That includes drainage, clearing efforts and high shoulder removals, which are ongoing along Nabouwalu to Qelewaqa, Wailevu Village in Labasa. The roadside mowing and pothole patching are taking place through Seaqaqa and repairing works are underway through the Oneva/Daria along Buca Bay Road.

Additionally, grading and compaction works are being conducted along Natewa West Coast Road, while preceding works are also in progress along the Nayarabale Road, Wainikoro towards Labasa. For the sealed sections of Wainikoro Road, drainage, clearing works are being undertaken from All Saints School in Vulovu towards Nagigi. While we are making these improvements, there are also challenging areas pending from Savusavu to Labasa. We are addressing rip, remake and re-seal as mentioned, towards Korotasere and Nayarabale and towards Labasa.

Unfortunately, these projects have been delayed. As the honourable Members understand, there have been challenges including the supply of materials, bitumen from overseas and sealing chip materials in the North. I do acknowledge that we have had issues with some contractors. Currently, we are dealing with that to expedite the process.

We are exploring alternative options in terms of tendering and awarding new maintenance contracts to other local contractors who can deliver the work efficiently and up to the standard required for the Northern Division before the end of this Financial Year. In the new Financial Year, we are

putting in place extensive programmes to continue to progress. The FRA will soon be looking at awarding small works programmes to local communities to ensure that there is ownership in these works, including registered youth groups and other local organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the necessary supply of bitumen, we are restocking this by next month and the rip and remake programmes will intensify after that. We know the road from Savusavu to Labasa is important, not just for travel but for businesses, farmers and everyday life and we are committed to doing better in Vanua Levu.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my recent visit to Vanua Levu was a very frightening experience on the back seat of a twin cab. The honourable Minister, while he was an Opposition Member, we used to talk a lot about *lovo* pit potholes, when there were going to be filled and now he has just been beating around the bush. The overgrown shoulders do not need materials.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, when it is time for questions, you have to confine yourself to the question and not make a general statement because that is exactly what you are doing here. Can you re-phrase it so that included in the question are some of those issues that you are raising? There are ways of asking questions that would include them.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when are you going to do the overgrown shoulders on the soil of the road, for example, Reservoir Road in Savusavu, right in front of Koro Sun Resort. All those, when are they going to be done? Do you have budget for that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- As I mentioned, it is incorporated into the current contracts. We have had issues with some of the contractors, something we are following up on. There is money, it is just that at times we face these issues.

You were in government, and you also faced those issues, but we are working on rectifying those, as I had explained. We are re-looking at the people who are doing the roadside clearing. By engaging the local communities, there is ownership in that. There have also been issues in terms of the performance of that cyclical roadside.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that most of the roads in the country are not well maintained, mostly in the rural areas. Last week I was in Rakiraki and met the former road supervisor for Rakiraki. My question is, what are we doing about those roads overall? Generally speaking, what are we doing as a government for the roads in Fiji?

MR. SPEAKER.- It is a general question for the honourable Minister.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- If you analyse that question, it is really a generalised kind of statement, which is like a generalised *Facebook*, some in the Opposition are used to making generalised *Facebook* type of statements that the roads in Fiji are not good. How do you quantify that? Has anyone really quantified that? From my estimation, maybe 10 percent or 15 percent can be said as not good. I think that is the kind of generalised statement which we need to get away from as a nation, not only this side of the House, the Opposition as well. Let us see things that reflect good on our country.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- If you keep on making generalised statements about our nation which are negative, then no tourists will come. You are chasing the tourists away, so do not do that.

Overall, I just want to make a comment relating to some of the materials. That goes back to the overall procurement and project management skills in Government. That is an area that was really decimated under the previous government, so we really need to build that up.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The Government on this side is building that up in terms of capacity building, et cetera. When you look at it, the procurement and project management skills is very, very important in all the Ministries and specifically for a ministry that deals with infrastructure. That is an area which we are working closely with the Ministry of Civil Service to rectify.

I do admit that, that is an area which we need to work on and we are committed to working on that and ensuring that there is significant capacity building. It applies across; not only in infrastructure but applies across whether it is buildings or even professional services. How do we ensure that there are overall project management skills from the project formulation, concept plan, the tenders and also the monitoring and evaluation and delivery.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- My question is specific, just so you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to this particular road that the question relates to - Savusavu and Labasa, because of its atrocious conditions and, yes, we have just come back from there, will you be doing a rip and remake or you are just going to fix the potholes, so to speak, bearing in mind that the budget year is about to finish?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, that is correct. Some portions of the road need a rip and remake and that is also in the programme.

Grant for Vanua Levu Road Projects  
(Question No. 20/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the \$300 million grant for the Vanua Levu road projects?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly we would like to acknowledge the People's Republic of China for that continued assistance and support through the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), in particular, China's Belt and Road Initiative Project earmarked for Vanua Levu. This project is implemented through the Office of the Prime Minister, under the agreement signed by His Excellency, the People's Republic of China Ambassador with the honourable Prime Minister.

The Ministry of Public Works and Meteorological Services, through the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) will provide necessary technical support and assistance. This project aims to improve Vanua Levu roads, in particular, parts of Nabouwalu, Makolei Road in Bua, Natewa West Road in Cakaudrove and Nabalebale/Naviavia/Dawara Roads in Cakaudrove. A feasibility study has been successfully conducted and completed. Bidding and tendering for project designs are underway with technical documentation works. Once the design is finalised, other necessary preliminary works will be carried out prior to the commencement and the mobilisation for the project.

This project will cover 15 kilometres Nabouwalu Road from the Sealed End Bridge to Nasolo Bridge; 35 kilometres Wailevu Coast Road, that is, from Nabalebale Junction to Doguru; and 32 kilometres Natewa West Road, that is, from Buca Bay to Korotasere. The project will also include upgrading of five bridges along the Nabouwalu Road, upgrading 10 crossings to proper bridges along Wailevu West Coast Road, and an upgrade of nine bridges and two crossings up to standard level along the Natewa West Coast Road.

That will have a significant impact on the socio-economic development of Vanua Levu. The rural communities residing along the roads being upgraded will also have better access to Government services and offices, and to markets. It enhances accessibility, reduces travel time and connects communities more efficiently. That not only supports the movement of people in Vanua Levu, but also stimulates local economic activities, such as agriculture, trade and small business operations.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his answer. He has talked about the processes in making roads, I chortled to myself, because he used to ask the exact same kind of questions that are coming from this side.

One of the segments of the road that will be built under this programme is the segment from Nabouwalu down to Nasolo, which is, I think, going to be tarsealed. I was on that road just a few weeks ago and it is in a very bad condition. Does Government have plans to make, at least, a road usable while we await the implementation of this big project that everyone in Vanua Levu is looking forward to, in particular, the segment from Nabouwalu down to Nasolo and Nasau in the *Tikina* of Nadi.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, definitely. Currently, it is part of the maintenance programme. My understanding is, they are working on it, and I will need to get an update on that portion of the road.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a question to the honourable Minister; I am concerned about the bridges within the roads that you have identified, and you have mentioned nine bridges. Does that \$300 million include the cost of the bridges or that will come under a separate allocation? Also, the fact that Naviavia Bridge has already been constructed during the last government's term.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that includes that. In addition, our team in the FRA and the Ministry are working closely with the Chinese team, to ensure that specifications and technical details are closely aligned with each other and in close consultation.

#### Continuous Procurement of Normal Saline (Question No. 21/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament on why the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services continues to procure normal saline on a monthly basis, despite the Ministry of Health stating that there is no shortage of IV fluid?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The Ministry has stated now and again that with the current global shortage of IV fluids, the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS) will continue to be affected with supply constraints.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, IV fluids are essential medicine used in hospitals for routine and critical care. They are crucial for fluid replacement, resuscitation and administering other medication directly onto the bloodstream. With that in mind, 350,000 bottles have been quantified by the Ministry for this financial year. Fijians also need to understand that Fiji does not manufacture medicine, therefore, we import them from countries abroad.

The Ministry considers medicines to be at a critical stock level when it reaches three months stock availability. During that stage, FPBS takes certain precautions while awaiting the arrival of the next supply. With the global shortage in IV fluids, the Ministry has to procure IV fluids every month to ensure our supplies do not reach critical level. In doing so, FPBS also makes emergency purchases through Request for Quotations (RFQ). Sir, RFQ is a much faster process, hence the frequent orders in small quantities, and are done while awaiting the tender quantities and dealing with changing expected time of arrivals from suppliers.

The FPBS also aligns itself to the Australian Government's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in terms of regulation of quality assurance. Sir, TGA is the Government authority responsible for evaluating, assessing and monitoring products that are defined as therapeutic goods. It regulates medicine, medical service devices and biologicals to help Australians stay healthy and safe.

Mr. Speaker, on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2025, TGA issued a statement that a global shortage of IV fluids is to be expected, which will continue through to 2025, with the main suppliers in the Pacific being B. Braun, Baxter and Fresenius. The shortages affect multiple bags of sodium chloride 9 percent, normal saline and compound sodium lactate or Hartmann's Solutions. The shortages are due to multiple factors, such as global supply chain limitations, unexpected increase in demand and manufacturing issues. Therefore, to improve supply, the FPBS have sourced IV fluids from other manufacturers in the international markets.

Mr. Speaker, FPBS is continuing negotiations through its contracted vendor whereby a consignment of approximately 100,000 is expected to be in this week. This stock should be sufficient for the next five to six months. The FPBS have been working tirelessly to secure any other registered IV brand in the local and international market through its procurement mechanism, to support patient care in more than 220 healthcare facilities on a weekly basis, from any available stock.

There has also been a conservation strategy applied through clinical services, that all health facility level with shortages and we will continue to monitor in relation to international market local shortages. During a recent visit to India, we had an opportunity to visit a few manufacturing plants whereby one of them specialises in manufacturing IV fluids alone. Discussions are ongoing to consider Fiji as a potential market, despite our low supply position.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a simple question. With the current shortage of IV fluids in the country and dengue outbreak, can the honourable Minister confirm that the shortage of IV fluid led to the death of two students from the Western Division? Sir, IV fluid is the only stay when it comes to dengue outbreak. We do not have curative care, we can only have them on supportive care of IV fluids. Was that one of the reasons for the death of the two children in the Western Division?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the unfortunate deaths of the children, I can say with certainty in this august House that there were some medical issues surrounding their deaths and the shortage of IV fluids was not one of them.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a question concerning the issues surrounding the global supply chain. I remember post-COVID when we did the evaluation, one of the

suggestions made, honourable Minister, was for Fiji as a supply hub as well for the region. In that way, we will raise our stock level, at the same time, addressing our own needs and then meet the demands from the others. Is that still under consideration, honourable Minister?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, that is still part of the plan. As it is, I believe there are some tax incentives for pharmaceutical plants that want to come and establish themselves in Fiji, especially IV fluid manufacturers, and that is still open. Initially, I had talks with two investors who were willing to come over and set up IV fluid plants here, one is our very own. Nevertheless, in our trip to India, we have also asked one of the big companies there to come to Fiji, have a look at the opportunity of establishing themselves here, not only to serve Fiji, but also the region as well.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for the honesty. We, indeed, agree that our health sector needs as much investment from any government.

On the matter of shortage of IV fluids, I met someone last week during Committee visitations, and he stated the excess of medication at hospitals. The person asked, “Why are pharmacies based in hospitals closed early and not open 24/7?” People from the emergency have to buy in pharmacies that are open 24-7 to get medication to their sick relatives. So, if there is any consideration on keeping the pharmacies open 24/7 so that people have access to medication?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Government pharmacies do not open 24/7, but in cases of emergency, there are provisions of medication that are available at the Accident and Emergency (A & E) Department that will be given to the patient then and there, and they will be also issued a prescription on the next day to get the full course of the medication.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, that concludes our morning proceedings, honourable Members. The lunch hour is upon us. At this point, we will suspend proceedings, and Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, please, if you can join me in welcoming the Bachelor of Law students in the School of Law and Politics at the University of the South Pacific.

(Acclamation)

We welcome you to your Parliament. May this visit provide valuable insights into the workings of this institution for your benefit, it being the third arm of Government.

Fiji's Compliance to ICAO Security Audit 2023  
(Question No. 22/2025)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on Fiji's compliance status with ICAO Security Audit 2023?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Nand for his question. The International Civil Aviation Organization, or known as ICAO, conducted an aviation security audit of Fiji's Aviation security system from 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 to 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, under its Universal Security Audit Programme - Continuous Monitoring Approach or known as USAP-CMA. The primary objective of the USAP-CMA is to enhance global aviation security through audits and ongoing monitoring of member States' aviation security performance.

It is important to note that in accordance with ICAO Document 9807, the results of these audits are classified and shared strictly on a need-to-know basis due to the sensitive nature of the findings and their potential implications for aviation security. Sir, ICAO ensures the confidentiality of its member State's USAP-CMA audit results by safeguarding them on its secure portal, as they are considered sensitive security information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to highlight that the USAP-CMA audit of Fiji did not identify any significant security concerns (SSCs) which could have seriously impacted the safety of our aviation operations and our international reputation.

In ICAO aviation security terminology, a significant security concern refers to a critical operational deficiency in one or more of the following areas:

- (1) access control to security restricted areas;
- (2) cargo and mail security; and
- (3) passenger and hold baggage screening.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a SSC arises when an individual or item is able to access an aircraft within a sterile area without undergoing the required screening processes. This points to a breakdown in key security measures whether for people, baggage, catering or cargo and, ultimately, means the aircraft cannot be confirmed as secure. Such a failure, Sir, represents a major security risk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when an SSC is raised against a State, ICAO notifies other member States and airlines of this matter. In a worst-case scenario, the airlines may decide not to fly to the State because of the high risks associated with it. States that have received SSC in a USAP-CMA audit may

find it difficult to resolve the findings within the specified timeframe and to the standard required or expected by ICAO.

The ICAO USAP-CMA audit conducted in Fiji in 2023 reviewed 498 Audit Protocol Questions, assessing various components of aviation security and facilitation. The audit highlighted areas for improvement, particularly the need to strengthen Fiji's aviation security legislation and the implementation of facilitation measures, such as Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recently returned from the ICAO Facilitation Conference held in Doha, Qatar, an event generously sponsored by the State of Qatar. During the Conference, Ministers in attendance adopted the Doha Declaration, which reaffirms the commitment of ICAO member States to strengthening international collaboration to support the smooth and efficient movement of passengers, crew, cargo and aircraft across borders through innovative and technological advancement, such as the API and PNR, which are crucial for aviation security as they enable pre-identification of passengers and potential threats, facilitating border control and law enforcement efforts.

While Fiji did not have any SSC in the ICAO USAP-CMA audit, we cannot rest on our laurels or be complacent. There are areas for improvement which will require financial resources and, in many ways, focus on capacity building with our people in aviation.

To conclude, we will revitalise the National Air Transportation Facilitation Committee (NATFC) and National Aviation Security Committee (NASC), both of which play a vital role in ensuring Fiji remains compliant with international aviation security and facilitation standards. We are also working towards amending our Civil Aviation Security Legislation to ensure it is modern, robust and fit for purpose. Given that Fiji relies heavily on tourism, it is critical that we ensure that aviation is supported and protected so that it can continue to be an effective enabler for tourism, trade and connectivity.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister; you have talked about areas for improvement, although Fiji does not have any major issues in the ICAO assessment on security. Would you, please, highlight or clarify on some of the areas that need improvement and whether it needs resourcing as well, particularly in terms of financing?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, a critical area with ICAO is to make travel seamless across the globe. People must travel freely in a user-friendly environment, and this is one area where Fiji will be focusing on, going forward.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is to do with the API system, which is the information of every passenger in the plane that is transmitted to our border security at Nadi Airport. Before they arrive, the border security already has that information, as well as the PNR system. We need to set up a system at Nadi Airport, through Immigration, to make that possible.

Apparently, it was ready for implementation during the Qarase administration, but we remember who came after the Qarase administration, and they dismantled that, and it did not happen. However, we can be assured, Mr. Speaker, that we will be putting it in place, and Immigration will be tasked in that area.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have had this experience as well and it really frustrated you in the last trip that you had. Probably, it is more related to immigration, but in the

advance API and the PNR that you mentioned, we are having problems with our passports, honourable Deputy Prime Minister. What is the problem and how can that be fixed? He mentioned that, about immigration.

MR. SPEAKER.- I declare that I have a vested interest in that, honourable Minister.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I believe the honourable Minister for Immigration will make a statement on that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think it is under control.

I am referring here mostly in the incoming passengers to Fiji on how to facilitate that, and the way we are going, I think some of us have seen the queues at Nadi Airport. I came back from Doha and I was not happy with the queues that I saw there and I thought Doha is talking on how to facilitate it, and that will help in a big way - the PNR and API.

Strategies and Initiatives – India’s Tourism Market  
(Question No. 23/2025)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament on the strategies and initiatives Tourism Fiji is implementing to tap into the growing tourism market from India?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, my lucky day, two in a row.

Mr. Speaker, for tourism, it is given that we look beyond traditional source markets, being Australia and New Zealand. Those two markets alone currently represent 70 percent of our total arrivals in the country, and that has been the status quo for years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, India is one of the fastest growing outbound travel markets in the world. Its outbound tourism is expected to reach US\$18 billion in 2024 and keep growing at a compound annual growth rate of 11 percent, reaching US\$55 billion in the next decade. By 2027, India is expected to become the fifth largest outbound market, up from 10<sup>th</sup> in 2019. India has seen a rise in young aspiring Indian travellers with over 80 million passports. This generation is motivated by the need to ‘live in the now’.

At a summit in Perth last year, the Chief Executive Officer of Indian Hotels Company shared that today, they are amongst the highest spenders (US\$75 to US\$200 per night), which is more than the average US traveller. Underlying this growth is, of course, India’s economic expansion, with its contribution to global GDP more than doubling from 3 percent at the time of independence in 1947 to 7 percent today. Their literacy rate has surged from 23 percent to beyond 85 percent in that time. They are aggressively investing in the sector, with the number of airports set to double from 150 airports to 300 in the next few decades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of our greatest limitations to tapping into these growing long-haul markets is connectivity. Right now, they remain in our top 10 markets. Earlier this year, Fiji attended the largest travel market in the subcontinent - OTM India, in Mumbai, to meet partners. The feedback was that while India is a market of immense potential, the primary barrier remains air access.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, India is also driving outbound travel in Asia. Indian travellers prefer destinations closer to home, except for the US. One-third of Indian travellers travel to Dubai in the Middle East, followed by Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, which are on a big rise. There are also

competing destinations like Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius. So being geographically far means we need to ease the travel.

Before we can invest in any significant marketing, the issue of air connectivity needs to be resolved. The more flights and layovers, the more expensive and inconvenient a tourist trip becomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, talks are ongoing with Fiji Airways and the Indian carriers, like Air India, about how to streamline the connection and reduce the number of flights and layover times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airways is leveraging our codeshare agreement with Air India. Initially, direct air services are key but there are operational complexities. That, particularly, extended distance to hubs, like Delhi, which exceeds the range of our longest current route. That means we have to look at factors like aircraft performance and payload.

Despite those factors, the medium-to-long term outlook remains favourable. The viability of non-stop services will depend on sustained demand growth, evolving consumer travel patterns and the strategic deepening of airline and tourism partnerships. While we are having these discussions, there are marketing activities occurring because we recognise their value and potential, not just in tourism terms but in trade and investment.

Through Tourism Fiji, we are working with the High Commission to bring a series of Bollywood actors to Fiji later this year. Trade and media famils and working with key travel partners, specifically on groups and Meetings, Incentives, Conference and Exhibition (MICE) opportunities.

Tourism Fiji continues to work with a number of trade partners who do get to Fiji and give media interviews and PR to lift the profile of Fiji and to try and lift numbers. At present, Tourism Fiji maintains a presence in India through a representative agency, who continue to meet regularly with the travel industry to promote Fiji as best as they can. Although current marketing efforts are focussed on Delhi and Mumbai, there is growing interest in targeting Tier 2 cities as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we can all agree that India is a market that we can capitalise on. Whether we promote ourselves as a film destination, an investment destination or even as bilateral partners, it is my hope that we be ambassadors of Fiji in our own capacities.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation for his response. I note that there are no supplementary questions, so we will move on to the next Oral Question for today. However, I also note that honourable Shalen Kumar is not present, so we will move on to the Written Questions.

### Written Questions

Students who Benefitted from TSLs Assistance  
(Question No. 25/2025)

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

With the \$5.9 million allocation in the current budget for hardship assistance under TSLs, can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the number of students who have benefitted from this assistance and how much of the allocation has been utilised to date?

<sup>1</sup> HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response.

Update on Ministry of Waterways Projects  
(Question No. 26/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the following –

- (a) How many projects will be undertaken by the Ministry of Waterways in the current financial year;
- (b) How many projects are funded locally and those by donor agencies per Division; and
- (c) What are the current updates of each project?

<sup>2</sup> HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response.

Redeployment of Funds – 2024-2025 Budget  
(Question No. 27/2025)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics update Parliament on the detailed breakdown of the redeployment of funds amounting to FJ\$28,087,026 within the 2024-2025 budget, including the following information –

- (a) The project name, responsible Ministry, Head Number, Programme, Activity, and SEG number from which the funds were sourced, as outlined in the 2024-2025 Budget Estimates; and
- (b) Whether the funds redeployed are due to cost overruns, and if so, a detailed explanation for the additional costs?

<sup>3</sup> HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Patience is a virtue.

**WORK CARE BILL 2025**

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 84, I move:

That the Work Care Bill 2025 (Bill No. 07/2025), be read the first time.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Rely to Written Question No. 25/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education under Standing Order 45(3) is appended As Annexure I.

<sup>2</sup> Rely to Written Question No. 26/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways under Standing Order 45(3) is appended As Annexure II.

<sup>3</sup> Rely to Written Question No. 27/2025 tabled by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics under Standing Order 45(3) is appended As Annexure III.

[A Bill for an Act to establish the Work Care Fund and provide for compensation benefits for injured workers and pupils and for related matters (Bill No. 07/2025)]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, in accordance with Standing Order 84(1), the Bill has now been read the first time. The Bill will now be listed on the Order Paper and set down for second reading on a future sitting date.

Honourable Members, until such time that the honourable Minister will give notice to the second reading, I encourage honourable Members to utilise the time to peruse the Bill and prepare for debate, which will primarily focus on the principles and merits of the Bill.

### **ACCIDENT COMPENSATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025**

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 84, I move:

That the Accident Compensation (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 08/2025), be read a first time.

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

[ A Bill for an Act to Amend the Accident Compensation Act 2017 (Bill No. 08 of 2025)]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, in accordance with Standing Order 84(1), the Bill has now been read a first time. The Bill will now be listed on the Order Paper and set down for second reading on a future sitting date.

Honourable Members, until such time as the honourable Minister will give notice for the second reading, I would encourage all honourable Members to utilise the time to peruse the Bill and prepare the debate, which primarily focusses on the principles and merits of the Bill.

### **REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL SERVICE 2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Civil Service 2021-2022 Annual Report, which was tabled on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2025.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is my privilege to present the key findings and recommendations of the Standing Committee based on the Review of the Ministry of Civil Service 2021-2022 Annual Report. The Review revealed several critical areas that impact the efficiency, integrity and effectiveness of the public service in Fiji, and I will now briefly outline the core issues raised and the Committee's recommendations, Sir.

Firstly, the backlog of Annual Reports remains a pressing concern. These reports are not only statutory obligations under the Financial Management Act 2004 but also are key performance outputs for Permanent Secretaries. Despite that, Sir, significant delays persist.

Sir, to strengthen accountability, we recommend that the submission of Annual Reports be mandated as part of pre-budget consultations with the Ministry of Finance, and that their timely

completion be considered during the contract renewal process for Permanent Secretaries.

On the issue of Civil Service allowances, we acknowledge the rising cost of living and note the urgent need to update the General Orders 2011. While a review is underway, proposed amendments, including increases in meal, housing and hardship allowances, were deferred due to budget constraints. The Committee recommends that these proposals be reconsidered for inclusion in the 2025-26 National Budget to support civil servants in all parts of Fiji.

Regarding staff retention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Civil Service has initiated a multifaceted strategy. This includes salary reviews, retention allowances for high demand roles, structured career progression and improved work environments. The Committee supports this approach and recommends that Ministries integrate these strategies into their annual operational plans with regular audits to measure effectiveness.

We also identified the need for improved communication from PSC circulars. Currently, these are disseminated via Personal Assistants (PA) and Human Resources (HR) departments, and these circulars risk being overlooked or delayed. To improve access and transparency, we recommend using the govnet email system for direct and timely distribution to all civil servants.

The Committee noted ongoing compliance challenges with the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection (OMRS) Guidelines. Only eight Ministries achieved over 90 percent compliance, with issues ranging from unclear benchmarking to improper documentation. We recommend annual OMRS refresher training for recruitment panel members and sustained support from the Ministry of Civil Service to build a culture of compliance and transparency.

In terms of system accessibility, civil servants in rural areas and maritime areas face limited access to Human Resource Management Information System, which is currently restricted to the govnet network. While the employee portal offers broader access, the Committee calls for continuous investment in digital infrastructure to ensure all civil servants, regardless of location or duty location, can access vital HR systems.

On recruitment panels, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Public Service Commission highlighted common grievances, such as non-alignment with Knowledge, Experience, Skills and Abilities (KESA) criteria, panel qualifications and delays in the selection process. To address that, we would humbly recommend all Ministries to conduct regular OMRS training and improve procedural clarity around appeals. In reviewing training and scholarships, we commend the Ministry's effort to maximise returns from development partner funded programmes.

However, there remains a need to better assess the impact of training on institutional performance. We recommend stronger monitoring of the learning contract proposal outcomes and closer alignment with Ministry objectives.

Linked to that is the issue of bonded civil servants. While bonding is essential for accountability, the Committee identified challenges in tracking compliance, especially when trained staff leave the service prematurely. To protect public investment, we recommend stricter monitoring mechanisms and enhance retention strategies, post-bond.

On the matter of complaints management, while the Government Call Centre provides a central feedback mechanism, the Committee noted that many Ministries lack dedicated systems, and we recommend that all Ministries and Departments establish robust Complaints Management Systems with clear timelines and accountability measures.

Lastly, the Committee reviewed the status of government quarters. Although most are deemed liveable, a significant number remain vacant due to structural damage, especially from termite infestation in the Western and Northern Divisions. We commend the initiative to install solar systems in 61 quarters and recommend that the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Civil Service conduct regular inspections and renovations to avoid long-term deterioration and escalating maintenance costs.

The Committee calls on all Ministries and Departments to work closely with the Ministry of Civil Service to implement these recommendations, fostering a more efficient, responsive and accountable public service. On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list with me, the proviso is everyone is allotted eight minutes each to express their views.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion before this august House on the Review Report on the Ministry of Civil Service 2021-2022 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Civil Service is under my portfolio of responsibility as Minister for the Civil Service, and it plays the vital role of streamlining government policies and initiatives, to ensure consistency across Government and to enhance service delivery by the Civil Service for the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Civil Service Annual Report 2021 and 2022 was tabled before Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence and upon assessment of the Committee, eight recommendations were put forward to the Ministry to improve some of its key roles and processes that impact the whole of government services, as well as service delivery to the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe it will be appropriate that I focus my response on how the Ministry of the Civil Service is working on the implementation of those recommendations. The submission of the Annual Report is a mandatory deliverable for all Permanent Secretaries as it reflects the outputs and outcomes of all Ministries against their operational plans. The requirement of Annual Reports are stated under Section 45 of the Financial Management Act 2004, and in this regard, the Ministry of Civil Service will ensure that its Annual Reports are up to date and submitted on a timely basis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Civil Service will undertake a review and audit of the current performance-based system in the next financial year to ensure that ministries and departments are integrating staff retention strategies within their operational framework. To improve awareness and ensure timely dissemination of new and updated Government circulars the Ministry will utilise the Government email blast distribution system to reach all civil servants effectively. These circulars normally inform Ministries on new policies as well as new learning and development initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Civil Service supports the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence and will continue to provide technical support and assistance to Ministries and Departments on matters relating to the Open Merit Recruitment Selection (OMRS) guidelines. The Ministry will continue to deliver training on the OMRS guidelines to all Ministries ensuring compliance and better understanding of the process. These efforts are part of the Ministry's ongoing commitment to cultivating a culture of excellence in the civil service through regular audits and continuous interactions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of its policy review role the Ministry through the Public Service Commission will review the learning and development guidelines for the civil service and will ensure that civil servants attached to bond agreements are monitored and the review to focus more on that

career development opportunities in order to retain civil servants.

In terms of managing customer feedback and complaints the Ministry of Civil Service through its Government Feedback Call Centre, will establish a robust and effective complaint management system to ensure that timelines are met and feedback provided promptly. So, they are going to be very busy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not least, in relation to the maintenance and renovation of Government quarters as mentioned, the Ministry of Civil Service through the Office of Accommodation and Government Housing Unit, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and Meteorological Services, will conduct regular inspections of all divisional quarters. This will ensure that maintenance and renovation are carried out in a timely and cost-effective manner, avoiding high maintenance costs associated with deferred upkeep.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Minister for Civil Service, I will continue to ensure that the Ministry is on par with current trends in civil service standards to be able to assist other Ministries and Government related agencies up the ante on the civil service delivery. I think it is very appropriate that we have this class of aspiring lawyers to be here to listen to the debate on the report of the civil service and as well as the next one. So, stay, do not leave.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion. First of all, I would like to thank the Committee for the comprehensive report. From the report, I have noted that the Committee has come up with some very good findings and recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian civil service is the largest employer with over 35,000 civil servants. In context of Fiji, the civil service is strategically described as the core permanent administrative arm of the Government. The Fijian civil service plays a pivotal role in the Fijian economy, given their vast asset base, contribution to GDP, employment generation, and provision of public goods and services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the recommendations of the Committee is the timely dissemination of information. Effective communication of information to all civil servants is a key pillar of any functional organisation. The Ministry of Civil Service should improve awareness and ensure that information reaches all civil servants in a timely manner, regardless of where the civil servants are located.

The Ministry of Civil Service should come up with innovative methods, including digital platforms, regular updates, and feedback channels to bridge the communication gap. These measures will empower our civil servants to stay informed, connected, and aligned with organisational goals, as I mentioned, regardless of where they are located, whether they are out in the islands, maritime, or very remote areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another recommendation of the Committee is on training and awareness for civil servants. Continuous learning is very important in adapting to the evolving demands of public service. The Ministry should be committed to providing comprehensive training programs that enhance the skills and competencies of civil servants. Alongside this, awareness campaigns should be conducted to ensure that all civil servants understand their roles, responsibilities, and the resources that are available for them. The Ministry should work towards building a dynamic, productive, citizen-centric civil service.

One of the recommendations of the Committee is staff retention. Staff retention is the backbone of any successful institution. Our civil servants are the foundation of the Government's effectiveness, and the Government has to ensure that civil servants' satisfaction and well-being is paramount.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the number of civil servants who have resigned in the last two years is quite alarming. What are the Government's plans to minimise resignations and retain civil servants? The Government should seriously come up with innovative strategies without delay to stop the brain drain. It is important to create a safe space for staff where they feel welcome and comfortable coming to work. Civil servants' work should be recognised, and their hard work and feedback is valued if we want to retain civil servants. Did the Ministry of Civil Service obtain any feedback from civil servants in the last two years on what our civil servants want from their workplace environment?

One of the reasons given by those who have resigned recently is that the high cost of living mismatches little increase in their salaries, which came into effect in August last year. I urge the Government to reconsider civil servants' salary and give them an increase that they rightfully deserve.

The Government should holistically review the civil service salary structure. A major civil service review was set to take place last year. What is the progress on this? Where are we on this? Mr. Speaker, Sir, by addressing staff retention, improving communication and prioritising training and awareness, we can create a civil service that will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service. Mr. Speaker, I support the motion.

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my contribution to the motion before the House on Review Report of the Ministry of Civil Service for 2021 and 2022. There were eight recommendations by the Committee, and I would like to pick on a few.

Recommendation number one is the delay in submission of annual reports together with the audited accounts. That is an issue that has been highlighted by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts as well as other Standing Committees. We just came back from visiting almost all of the 14 Provincial Councils and this is one of the major drawbacks – the delay in submission of annual reports and audited accounts. There were very little control measures undertaken. This is the Report for 2021 and 2022.

As we were visiting the provincial councils, most of the reports were dated as far back as 2008 up to 2011, and some up to 2015. We do not see any control measures. What has been recommended by the Committee is to try and tie this up during budget consultations. If they go and demand for a budget increase, first they must convince the Ministry of Finance that they have submitted the required financial annual reports for the years they served. In the Report there is nothing of that sort. Even though there is a lot of backlogs, the process of giving more and more budget year-in-year-out continued. That is why most of the Ministries and Departments continue to delay the submissions of the report, knowing that nothing will eventuate.

One of the recommendations too, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on the OMRS. I would like to touch a little bit on the OMRS, which did not address a lot of issues as it was intended for. With a lot of issues arising, as stated in the report. Another pressing issue that emanated of the OMRS was that it heavily affected the succession planning within the Ministries and Departments. People from outside may have merits with academic qualifications, they are in no way matched to those who are matured on the job with relevant qualifications.

I thank the Ministry of Civil Service that they are currently reviewing the OMRS and coming up with the best recruitment system that looks at both academic qualifications as well as on-the-job experience. We have touched on the civil servants who are serving in rural communities and maritime; they are deprived of very important information because of lack of these communications from the headquarters to them in terms of vacancies that do arise within the Ministries and Departments, as well as training.

We are asking those in leadership in the Ministry to try and consider new ways of developing a system that ensures that information is easily passed on to those in the rural and maritime communities. Starlink is one of the best examples. In our Ministry of Rural and Maritime, we are trying. I think almost all our stations in the rural and maritime are all equipped with Starlink to make sure that information is easily passed onto them and vice versa.

In terms of training, the opening of the Fiji Learning Institute for Public Service (FLIPS) by the honourable Prime Minister on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 is a physical demonstration of Government's commitment in capacity building for over 35,000 public servants across the four divisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that for us who have served in the civil service throughout our entire working career, we know how officials were treated when they were given opportunities for studies either locally or abroad. Most of them, they go on study on leave with pay and their post were being secured. But that was not the case, as we look back at the report, most who went on study abroad were asked to go on leave without pay or even resign, or some of them lost their jobs when they came back. Most of the civil servants that studied abroad, are no longer in the civil service as they have joined non-governmental organisations. So those are some of the issues that the current administration is going to address, as we try to improve the working conditions for those serving in government, especially the Ministry of Civil Service. I support the motion before the House.

HON. P. D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also acknowledge the Committee for their Report. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the civil service is the backbone of any functioning government. It is the engine that delivers essential services. It upholds the rule of law and ensures public resources are managed responsibly. Regardless of political change, the civil servants must serve every Fijians not with biasness, but with dedication, fairness, and integrity. However, we cannot keep on talking about building a stronger Fiji unless and until, we confront the reality; and that is the performance of our civil servants which must improve.

When we meet people and I am sure not only us, even the Government side, they tell us the difficulties they face. Application forms for assistance programmes go missing, people are sent from one ministry to another, desperately seeking help, only to be met with delays and inefficiencies. Are our hospitals running better because these are run by civil servants? Are our teachers better supported? Are our farmers receiving timely assistance? Sadly, the answer is, painfully obvious.

Having said that, there are civil servants who know how the civil service should operate and are performing accordingly. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if services were being delivered effectively, our people would not be pleading with Ministers or desperately reaching out to Members of Opposition; that alone exposes the failure. Mr. Speaker, Sir, poor service deliver affects ordinary Fijians. Fijians who may not have money to go to a private doctor, who may not have that kind of funds to seek assistance privately. They rely on government services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government speaks of reforms, we have just heard about the new training institute which the honourable Prime Minister opened and overseas programmes for senior officials. I also read where the honourable Prime Minister met an organisation while he was on an overseas trip and he talked about improving the civil service. All these sounds good and exposure is needed for the civil servants. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the real question remains - how will we maintain the discipline, how will be maintain professionalism and how will we measure success for our civil servants?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there should be an effective oversight on the Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department, as this is where the implementation deficit of the Government comes from. It is their failures that result in slow or no implementation. We have discussed unutilised budgets in

Parliament which, in terms of civil service or ministry, it is called “savings” - giving a positive spin, but we know if that money is not utilised, that means that service is denied to the people. A good example is, which we discussed in the last budget was \$12 million allocated to the Ministry of Health to purchase equipment, but only 39 percent of that money was utilised, that meant that that equipment was not bought.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Recommendation 7 about complaints management, strict timelines and meaningful feedback should be a matter of basic professionalism. Yet even after complaints are raised with Ministers, and when the Ministers pass this information to ministries, they continue to disregard those complaints and there has to be a change in attitude. I would not call it just an inefficiency, it is actually a disrespect to people who pay our salaries as well as Civil Service salaries.

Let us not forget that more than \$1 billion goes towards civil servants’ salary which is paid by taxpayers and the taxpayers, that is, the people of this country deserve equivalent or even more level of service delivery which is not forthcoming. I believe that both the Government and Opposition must work together to build a Civil Service system that is strong, independent and resilient; a system that operates well, no matter who sits on the government bench.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure the Ministers have experienced that, when I was a Minister, I also experienced some of the difficulties you face as a Minister when you want to deliver those programmes, you want to deliver those services and then there are bottlenecks. The civil servants will come and tell you why they are not able to do this and that, always reasons for not doing it, rather than coming up with strategies on how they can overcome those challenges to deliver those services.

Recommendation 6 - Career Development Opportunities. It is crucial to create real transparent pathways for civil servants, but what do we see? Skilled career civil servants are overlooked. Political friends, campaigners and allies are rewarded with cushy diplomatic posts and senior roles. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a betrayal of merit, a betrayal of fairness and a betrayal of every hard-working civil servant who deserves better.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We need a system that rewards hard work and expertise, not connections and political loyalty. We must rebuild a culture where public service is about serving the public. We must get the fundamentals right.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Report on the Civil Service. I would just like to make a few comments on the report itself, especially on 3.3.3, there have been various issues raised, some of the key strategies. Before that, I would like to mention that the Government is determined as already mentioned by the honourable Prime Minister in terms of improving and reforming the Civil Service. Some of the issues which had been raised, if you look at the Government strategic document, the National Development Plan, it is clearly articulated there. One of the main ones, the one which I think stands out or sort of jumps up when I read it was the promotion of innovation in the Public Service; that is the key issue.

When we came in, I am not sure, it could be a result of the previous government, the issue about innovation. We are mentioning in the National Development Plan, the promotion of innovation. When I say innovation, I mean the motivation to think independently and move forward. After we were appointed in 2022, that is one of the key issues which we found as one of the key issues which sort of dragged us down to move forward. That is something which we are promoting and something which we need to encourage within our Civil Service, not only that, I had mentioned the term “capacity building” in project management. Whatever we do, if you project manage it, you ensure that it

succeeds whether it is in the budget or separate budget which is with the development partner, that is something which we really need to improve on.

We also mentioned the decentralisation of the public services, which we are currently working on. One of the Member's had mentioned the remuneration and salary. Again, that is part of the current review. We also note in the Report on recommendation 3.3.3 - reviewing performance-based reward system and also on performance management in general. This will only work if from the beginning we know what we are out to achieve. Again, that is an area which we are working on in terms of setting out from the budget the key objectives which we need to achieve and also aligning that with the key performance indicators from the Permanent Secretary and breaking that down to the various levels from Director, Assistant Director and downwards. I think when we do that, we are clear on what we need to achieve and also assessing whilst we have those kinds of key performance indicators from the various areas that we achieve or do not achieve and the reasons for non-achievement.

The other important area which was also highlighted there is skills - loss of skills or resignations, which the Opposition had mentioned had increased drastically under this government. Where is your data? You did not even mention any data on that. I am very concerned about those generalisations. From my recollection, more resigned under your government than this government. That is the fact of the matter. Not only because of salaries, et cetera but also because of the political environment which you had ruled the civil servant, you had kept them under.

Honourable Premila Kumar mentioned the political appointments, but if we do a research, how many political appointments you made compared to us? How many? Not only political appointments, but also political victimisation in the Civil Service.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So it is not only appointments but victimisation. If we go back and do a research, you did more damage to the civil servants than us ...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Where is your data?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... which is why in the National Development Plan, I do not know whether you are bothered to read it or not, how many of you came to the launch?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I did.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you. If you read it, it is rectify those issues which had been problematic in the Civil Service.

The last one before I run out of time, when you look at the National Development Plan, for example, under energy and electricity, there are a lot of good things there, but it boils down to human resources. And even for us in our Department of Energy, there has been a high turnover for various reasons which we cannot really, I suppose, control but we are working on rectifying those. In a technical area such as energy, there are various targets there, but all these are impacted by human resources. So, proper planning is really needed and that is why, as a Government, we are looking at the review of the Civil Service and the National Human Resource Development Plan, and ensuring that these are clearly linked to the vision, mission and addressing current issues that we have.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, let me acknowledge the Committee for the Report that has brought up a few pertinent issues that we need to address. Let us get away from the politics, let us address the issues, particularly Government, you are now the Government. Get it fixed rather than coming up with excuses.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Too much talk.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- For us to attract and raise the level of performance in the Civil Service, we need to create the environment. We need to entice good people to join the Civil Service. And creating the environment is so important, particularly I have always talked about this, the link in the political leadership and the Civil Service because good governance is sourced in political leadership and that provided by the Civil Service. So, we need to pay particular attention on this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not try and go back on what the other colleagues have stated, but I just wish to go again to the Report particularly on 3.2.1 on policy development, implementation and monitoring unit. I wish to comment on two particular areas - scarcity of specialized skills within the Civil Service and recruitment process that is involved.

I hope that the Ministry of Civil Service has done some analysis on the scarcity of specialised skills across the Civil Service in the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Forestry, because what we have is what we get. We need to look at specific areas that will elevate and improve on the performance, particularly in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of the Civil Service which is important for us as a developing country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have always said this in previous Parliament sessions when we talk about these issues, there are two critical posts in Government that we really need to look at - Human Resource Managers and Training Officers. In most Ministries, these posts are just filled for the sake of filling the post. We need to get the right people so that they can deliver and do the job because the Training Officer has to look at the training needs cycle, conduct training needs analysis to design the training, to conduct the training, to do training evaluation and training validation.

There is a process to be followed, but unfortunately people are in the wrong place because they are recruited just to fill the posts rather than doing the job so that we can see improved performance. Of course, the role of Human Resource Managers is so important because in organisations, there is a link between recruitment process, training and development within or we look at the exit strategy. Let us not condone inefficiency, therefore, our recruitment process is so important.

Let us recruit the right people based on the competencies of the job. If that competency is lacking, that is where training and development comes in, so that they can perform better in the role that they play. Otherwise, the exit strategy must be considered, rather than pleasing people, because we have a service to deliver, and we have outcomes as well. I have talked about outcomes, outcomes, outcomes in the last budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is very critical. Recruitment policy, training and development within, or exit strategy, and that is why we need qualified people in these areas.

Honourable Vocea has talked about the OMRS, subject to review. Let us review it again. There are merits in the OMRS, there are probably some issues as well, but let us make it work. Let us make the process work. Experiences are good, but experience has its limits as well. We need to consider both the experience and the qualifications because that is very important for us, if we want improved services in the Civil Service. On the issue of core skills training, I totally agree. This is again an area that we need to look into, because for us to have improved service delivery, effectiveness and efficiency in the Civil Service, we will also need to have the right people performing in these various works.

I have talked about the competencies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is very important for us in terms of the way forward and I am thankful that the institution is up and running because in adult learning environment, there are issues about recognition of prior learning and current competencies. These are all the things that need to be factored within so that we can then look at the long-term objective.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because of time limitation, on the housing issue, this is important. Let us not only look at Government quarters but government rented quarters as well, in which civil servants are accommodated in, particularly in the areas where there is inadequate housing. I know that the Permanent Secretary responsible is in the House, we used to have this divisional housing committees, then we have the national committee, apart from the work of the public works and the office and accommodation officers, that committee, under the divisional commissioners, play a critical role in ensuring that the living environment for our civil servants, not only government quarters, but government rented quarters as well, are at the highest standard. The philosophy should be, let us not demand from them when we are not creating the environment for them to excel. They are humans and we need to create the right environment so that they can excel in their workplaces.

MR. SPEAKER.- Given the time, I will ask for an early tea break today, we have two more speakers plus the Right of Reply by the mover, we will proceed with the Suspension Motion. For the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a Suspension Motion.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

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

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we still have two more motions on Annual Reports of Parliament and also in terms of the Nausori Town Council.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend the proceedings for tea break and Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.51 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.25 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as I have stated earlier, we have yet to exhaust our list of speakers on this motion. There are two remaining speakers on the list before I ask the mover to exercise her right of reply.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL SERVICE 2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Chairperson of the Committee for the Report. I also thank the honourable Prime Minister for laying down the reforms and plans that the Ministry of Civil Service has with respect to how we can make our Civil Service more efficient, more agile and more responsive to the delivery of service to our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had some good and, perhaps, a bit lofty sentiments about the role of the Civil Service, the independence of the Civil Service and the neutrality of the Civil Service, regardless of who is in Government. It is important for us to remember this and talk about it. I just hope that the honourable Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues on the other side have some decency also to acknowledge what was happening within the Civil Service.

As a new Government, we inherited a Civil Service riddled with uncertainty, fear and insecurity, and a complete politicisation of the Civil Service under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. Section 127(a), Mr. Speaker, Sir, clearly laid down how the Civil Service was politicised because it says very clearly that the hiring, firing and setting up of the salaries of the civil servants will be by the Permanent Secretary, with the agreement of the Minister concerned.

I know this, when I was in Opposition, so I want to highlight to the people of this country and to our civil servants, many of them are hardworking civil servants that, yes, there are always in any organisation, a kind of normal curve, you will have some very bright strong performers, you have a bulk in the middle and then you will have on the other side of the normal curve those who, perhaps, do not do the work they are required to do.

However, let me say what we have done in the last two years, and this Government must be given credit for that. The honourable Prime Minister should be given credit for that as the Minister responsible for the Civil Service. The first thing we recognised that we needed to bring certainty, give our civil servants security in tenure, so we moved away from contracts to a permanent tenure. Some people are saying that we did it too early, we should have gotten rid of some of the political appointees who were there, but we did not even do that. We wanted to show that when a Government changes, the civil servants remain neutral and apolitical.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition was in Vanua Levu, going around, and civil servants were actually welcoming them. I was asked by a senior civil servant about one and a half years ago, and he said, “Sir, one of the Opposition Members want to come and visit, should we allow?” I said, “Of course, please, give them the same respect that you give to the honourable Ministers.” That is the change we have brought into this country. The reason why we do that, is to ensure that our civil servants remain neutral and apolitical.

Honourable Hem Chand is very fond of making generalisations. He talked about civil servants pay. Since 2017, none of the civil servants had any pay rise, including the teachers, doctors and nurses. It is this Government that has raised the salaries and wages of our civil servants from between 7 percent

to 20 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it does not make sense for the honourable Opposition Members to come here, generalise and pontificate about what they expect the civil servants to do because of the damage they did – 16 years of complete destruction, mental and physical! The honourable Minister for Works is absolutely right. There was mental, physical, sacking and removing of people in not only the Civil Service, but in Boards and other places as well. That culture is behind us, we have done that in two years, and that is a very significant step by this Government.

The second issue that we are saying, and we were landed with, we are talking about staff quarters and the honourable Members of the Opposition had also talked about. You go around the country and look at the dilapidation that occurred over the last decade of the infrastructure staff quarters, whether it is nurses' quarters, teachers' quarters and hospitals. I was in Kadavu and I salute the civil servants in Kadavu for staying there and serving our people, despite the conditions in which they live and work.

As I have said, we are now putting appropriate budgets and appropriate funding to fix civil servants' quarters, civil servants' space and environment. The Government offices needed a lot of renovation in a lot of places, and we are doing that. We have not been able to complete everything, but the Ministry of Public Works and the plans that we have is going to resolve a lot of those issues.

Yes, I agree with honourable Kumar that Government spends close to about \$1.2 billion. In 2014, we had 27,000 civil servants and wage earners. In 2022, it increased to 33,000. Now, it is 37,000, and the biggest increase in the last two years and before have been in major Ministries - Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, the RFMF and police. In fact, for the Ministry of Health, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we created new positions. We included Nursing Aid, Nursing Assistants because we were losing a lot of them, and that was what we did. There was additional staff.

We are talking about the reasons why civil servants are resigning and leaving. Again, it is a complete generalisation, as they were talking about. Some of them said last year, “Oh, many people are migrating since this Government has come in.” When I gave them the statistics on the number of people who left from 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, they went quiet. They should stop making generalisations that this is happening or that is happening.

Honourable Vijay Nath was saying, “Oh, grass has grown in Vanua Levu.” I went through Savusavu the other day. Come to Parliament with some specific questions and better facts so that you do service to the people who actually raised this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we are saying is, the funding that we have provided Ministry of Civil Service was \$50 million in 2023-2024. In the last Budget, it was \$76 million, and this is appropriate budget for the Ministry of Civil Service to undertake a lot of the activities that the honourable Prime Minister pointed out in making sure that our Civil Service becomes efficient, agile, and is delivering the service.

HON. J. USAMTE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Deputy Prime Minister. When you are given an allotted time, good and effective use of time means ‘you go up to that time’. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister said that these things are politicised. I want to ask the honourable Members on the other side, Deputy Prime Minister, the person who is your PSO, was he one of the political candidates in your party? Did you appoint Permanent Secretaries who are failed candidates? Can you answer that? The one sitting at the back, all of you have put people that were part of your campaign team into Government.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- You have destroyed the Civil Service by what you have done.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- And you have the audacity to stand there and make accusations including the Deputy Prime Minister himself.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Give the facts!

HON. J. USAMATE.- All of you, the people that were beside you during the campaign, you have destroyed the Civil Service.

The Deputy Prime Minister, earlier on, this year, said, ‘the security of tenure has led some civil servants to become slack’, that was what he said in March 2025. So, the very system that you put in place, now that it leads to problems and you are trying to hit the blame on us. What this Government has done, Sir, is destroying the Civil Service. You have destroyed the Civil Service the way you have appointed people into positions left, right and centre. Political appointees, that is the thing that is going to destroy the institutions of this country, Sir.

Before you start throwing the stone, look at yourself in the mirror. I will quote the verse that my colleague, the honourable Minister for Justice always says, Matthew 7-5. Remember that verse, because it applies to all of us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the first recommendation is about the submission of annual reports, their requirement for Permanent Secretaries and I agree wholeheartedly with that. Here in Parliament, we are supposed to review the performance of government departments when annual reports do not come. We cannot do our jobs. I think it is absolutely mandatory that this must be done, that all Civil Servants must be held to account.

If they are not able to deliver, then you have the wrong person directing where the bus is going. Get him off the bus, do not put the wrong person on the bus! You put some wrong people into the buses of some ministries and you saw the shambles that took place in those ministries.

In the early part of 2023-2024, disasters happened because you willy-nilly selected people and put them in charge of ministries. When you do that, you do not look at all the Civil Servants that have worked their way through their career, you do not give them the opportunity. You take your failed candidates, your failed cronies in your political agenda and you put them in pressing ministries and that is what happens. Do not do that, do the right thing! Preserve the Civil Servants for the sanctity and the future of the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Recommendation No. 4 talks about how to address the culture of actions. The Ministry of Civil Service needs to continuously provide support to all ministries and departments to achieve a culture of actions. What we have seen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problem with the culture of actions now is that the people who are leading government do not demonstrate actions themselves. They say things and they deliver something that is absolutely different.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister said he would reduce debt. He has increased it and he has done the exact opposite. The honourable Minister of Sugar said, ‘as soon as he comes in, the sugar will go up’. It has not gone up; it has gone down. He said, he will put the Rarawai Sugar Mill back in but never happened. So, when your leaders are saying something and doing something else, what do

you think the Civil Servants are going to do? They will believe that it is alright to say something and not achieve it. The leaders in Government must walk the talk. They must be making sure that we can deliver and when your civil servants see that, they will start doing what you are supposed to be delivering.

Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau mentioned the importance of the National Development Plan. One of the problems, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the National Development Plan, if you look at the targets and you look at the indicators, there is a misalignment of the targeted indicators.

If you want to achieve the target, you must measure the right thing. If you are measuring the wrong thing, you will get the wrong result. That is why you are not getting the execution because when you set the targets and you look at the indicators of what is to measure the target, it is the wrong thing. That is why your execution is wrong. That is happening in this government, it did not happen before, but definitely it is happening now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would venture to suggest, after all, that I have to agree with the Deputy Prime Minister because of what he said, but I want to say this. I believe in my mind a lot of very good civil servants need good leadership, they need good systems and processes. They need systems of continual improvement that is built into the way they do things.

There is a programme that we used to run in government that is very good for this. Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, I ask the Civil Service to reconsider the Service Excellence Programme. Service Excellence Programme was run on the same precepts as the Malcolm Baldrige Award, an internationally recognised system of improving performance. It is focused on systemic learning, it is talking about its focus on visionary leadership and on centre of excellence, valuing people, agility and resilience. I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is a great tool to review and to reconsider.

We used to have it for all the different agencies. I think the honourable Assistant Minister Vanawalu used to be one of the evaluators of this and it is a great way of teaching people not only how systemic organisations work, but it gives your high potential people in the civil service the ability to participate as evaluators, learn about how to run good organisations and then they take that system back and improve the civil service. I believe in my heart there are a lot of good civil servants. They need to have good leadership. The leaders need to be able to show the right thing. We need to build the right processes, the right systems, the right continual improvement project.

When you are talking about training, we are setting up what is called the “Public Sector Institute of Learning”, but in order for that to work, the whole process must work. There must be a good training policy, there must be good TNAs developing to good programmes and the programmes must be evaluated. All that must work. It is all part of the process, I would like to congratulate the Committee.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister said we did not increase the salary. Let me tell you the truth, we increased salaries between 15 percent to 65 percent, up to 65 percent not your measly 7 percent, 10 percent, 65 percent!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order!

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Usamate said two things which are....

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is the number?

HON PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Standing Order (62)(1) - imputing improper motive. First, he said, I have increased debt. I have said that we have reduced debt to GDP ratio from 90 percent to 78 percent and that is the measure. The nominal debt went up from \$10 billion to \$10.8 billion. Everyone knows that and that is not what we hide. But he comes here and lies that I said that debt to GDP ratio has gone down.

The second thing is, he is talking about when they increase salary in the last 16 years. I said that since 2017, there was no salary rise. We came in and gave a salary rise of between 7 percent to 20 percent, depending on where people were. So he is misrepresenting the facts that I have said in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and he has been proven wrong before, and he will be proven wrong again.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, he said there were no salary increases, and I assured him that we increased it by 65 percent.

MR. SPEAKER.- He has qualified it by saying since 2017. That is a qualification, does that still have an issue?

HON. J. USAMATE.- To my mind, Sir, he said that there was no increase during our time. There were increases in the military, there were increases in the police, all across the different sectors in the medical profession; increase their pay from \$45,000 to \$67,000. The amount of increase in the pay of the doctors and nurses was unprecedented and because of that, we were able to retain specialist doctors in this country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important for us to always speak truth in the house of the people.

MR. SPEAKER.- I did take note of the time that was overspent by the Deputy Prime Minister. I was going to give you 54 more seconds because you have the right but that is beside the point. I now call on the honourable Qereqeretabua, the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, to speak in reply.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, I want to thank each and every member who contributed very passionately to this Review Report of the Ministry of Civil Service 2021/2022 Annual Report. I know that the very impassioned contributions have been garnered and have come from a place of deep concern for our Civil Servants, and also from a place of decades of loyal service and faithful service to the Civil Servant. So, I thank all the contributors to this debate.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –  
PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI 2019-2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2019-2020 and 2020-2022 Annual Reports which were tabled on 11th

March, 2025.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, it was with great respect that I present the Standing Committees key observations and recommendations from the Consolidated Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, covering the years 2019 and 2020 and 2020 to 2022 Annual Reports.

The findings highlight opportunities for improvement in civic engagement, operational efficiency and institutional resilience, particularly in light of challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the primary areas of focus, Mr. Speaker, is the Revitalization of Parliament's Education Programme or one of the primary areas is the Revitalization of Parliament's Education Programme.

The pandemic severely disrupted outreach to schools and communities, and consequently a student previously exposed to civic training have now exited the education system creating a knowledge gap. The Committee recommends that Parliament review its Civic Education Strategy with a renewed focus on digital platforms, and this includes the production of short engaging videos, children's programmes and educational snippets *via* the Parliament TV and social media. And furthermore, if we have time and of course the budget we propose a national survey to evaluate the impacts of these efforts.

The Committee also observed a lack of public engagement during a livestreamed parliamentary consultations, and to remedy this, we recommended increased and strategic promotion of Parliament's business across digital platforms and encouraging wider public participation. Members of Parliament and Committee members are also invited to amplify this outreach by sharing updates on their own networks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, accessibility emerged as another concern, particularly during parliamentary tours. Many communities participating in the tours of Parliament are not fluent in English, and the Committee recommends that presentations be made in the vernacular language and also suggests inviting Members of Parliament to interact with visitors in the chamber, further enriching their experience.

Legal advisory delays were also brought to light, Mr. Speaker, the Committee supports the ongoing dialogue to establish a parliamentary legal counsel and in-house resource that would enhance the institution's capacity for timely and independent legal advice. While recognising that this may take time to implement we urge that momentum be maintained in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance.

In terms of parliamentary reporting delays in producing verbatim reports were noted due to the significant workload of Hansard Reporters. We commend the Parliament's investment in the multi-language translations and captioning project, which is expected to enhance a reporting efficiency.

The Committee as well, Mr. Speaker, agrees that the current focus should remain on improving technology rather than hiring additional staff for the short-term. The Committee also reviewed the management of non-expandable assets and noted an excess of unused furniture and equipment. The Committee recommends exploring alternative disposal methods such as auctioning or donating use of items to schools on charities with the Ministry of Finance's support.

In promoting institutional heritage, the Committee suggests the establishment of a parliamentary history gallery inspired by New Zealand's and illustrated history initiative. With space constraints currently limiting this effort, we understand that this may take time as well. The Committee also reflected on Parliament's response to unforeseen destructions as COVID-19 showed us. While efforts were made to keep key staff with digital tools, not all staff had the necessary resources to work from home. Moving forward, Parliament has committed to better preparedness by providing essential ICT tools and encouraging the use of Office 365 and SharePoint for the continuity in future crisis.

In terms of performance-based rewards, the Parliament continues to use the MyAPA system to assess staff performance. However, the Committee's concerned that there is no alignment with the Ministry of Civil Service standards to ensure fairness and strengthen staff retention. We recommend benchmarking performance assessments and providing appropriate rewards such as bonuses or salary increments based on verified outcomes.

In summary Mr. Speaker, the Committee recognises the efforts made by the Parliament to adapt and evolve amidst challenges by also noting areas that require urgent reform. From improving civic education and communication, to ensuring internal efficiency and rewarding staff performance, these recommendations are designed to enhance the impact, transparency and effectiveness of Parliament, as an institution of the people. I therefore, recommend this motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. I have a batting line up of six; three from each side at eight minutes each. I now first call on the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee that made the report and also the Chair for tabling this report and moving the motion. I rise to support the motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament under the Republic of Fiji, based on the Westminster Parliamentary system and guided by the 2013 Constitution, is the country's unicameral legislative one. It comprised 51 members after the 2018 Elections and 55 members after the 2022 Elections. Section 46(1) of the Constitution, vest Parliament with the authority to enact laws with Presidential assents.

Parliament is the voice of Fijian people to ensuring public safety, promoting an economic opportunity, upholding equality, delivering services and overseeing Government operations and Section 79 of the Constitution establishes the Secretary-General of Parliament, who manages the institution's operations and overseeing staffing, parliament staff provide through critical procedural advise and administrative support, ensuring effective and efficient functioning of the legislative body.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the Members of Parliament who were serving Parliament at the time of the report, and I remind honourable Members, that we are going to be debating the report of that time. We are not debating the pros and cons, the goods and the bads of the current staff and how they operate. Like we had just done in the review of the civil service, it is like anachronism. We bring out something several times. We are talking about something that is not being reported on, based on what we see as what is currently happening.

Parliament serves as the voice of the Fijian people and you will remember that in his Opening Address, His Excellency, the President said that this is a House of Hope.

Key achievements between 2019 and 2022: The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji recorded several significant achievements in fulfilling its legislative and oversight mandate. I thank all those

involved at that time. During this period, Parliament successfully passed 144 Acts and ensured 100 per cent *Hansard* reporting for all sittings, maintaining the integrity and transparency of the proceedings.

It is a recognition of the work ethics of the parliamentary staff that despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, Parliament swiftly adapted by introducing hybrid sittings that continued the institution's operations while safeguarding public health. The Parliamentary Committee remains highly active, convening over 1,350 meetings, many conducted virtually, and tabling 139 reports in Parliament. Fiji's Parliament also strengthened its international engagement, hosting and participating in key regional and international forums, thereby reinforcing its diplomatic and legislative linkages.

Internally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Parliamentary secretariat focused on capacity building by recruiting new staff, renewal of contracts, and offering internship opportunities to support operational effectiveness. The public outreach efforts were expanded through enhanced use of Parliament television and social media platforms, while targeted youth engagement initiative for a strengthened civic awareness. Additionally, Parliament maintained sound financial management practises, optimised budget utilisation, and invested in governance, research, ICT, and legal services to better support the work of the Members and uphold its institutional mandate.

Recommendations and future outlook: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report puts forward a number of key recommendations that deserve serious consideration to further strengthen the operations and services of our Parliament. Firstly, the Committee has recommended a review of the Civic Education Strategy with a greater emphasis on utilising Parliament television, social media platforms, and the development of short educational videos and children programmes to enhance public understanding of Parliament's work. Parliament is also encouraged to undertake a survey to assess the effectiveness of these outreach programmes.

In my contribution earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thanked the school that has sent these aspiring lawyers to be here. I joked with the honourable Deputy Prime Minister on when are we going to see aspiring agriculturalists and farmers come here, to listen about what the lawmakers in the country are concerned about. We are dealing with the civil servants and you are here. We are now dealing with Parliament and you are here. It is very appropriate that we have Parliament open to those who are going to be executing the various policies that we put out as Parliament.

I also wish to highlight the importance of the recommendations and to underscore the need to invest in professional development and operational capacity of the Parliament secretariat. We think they are not doing well, but at the moment, they are doing very well, but the survey observations found at the time that this is to be brought back to the attention of the Ministry responsible for the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, we must continue to build a Parliament that upholds transparency, inclusivity, and service to the people of Fiji. As lawmakers where we pass laws that ensure the nation's safety, security, wellbeing, and prosperity. I thank the Committee Members involved, and I thank the honourable Chairperson for bringing this motion to the House and I support the motion.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to speak in favour of this motion, the Consolidated Review Report of the Parliament of Fiji 2019-2020 and 2020-2022 is more than just a report. It is a proof of how important and hard working our Parliament is. It shows the many ways Parliament serves our nation and how it handles challenges with courage and determination. Parliament is where we make decisions of our nation's future. It is where laws are created, to make life better for every Fijian. It is where leaders work together, share ideas and debate solutions.

Parliament also keeps the government accountable and ensures the voices of all citizens are heard. The Report shows us how Parliament kept working during tough times especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even when life was disrupted, Parliament found ways to adapt. Hybrid sittings where some Members joined virtually ensured the important work of law making continued without pause. This shows how strong and committed this institution is. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlights many achievements and areas for improvements. Here are a few important points:

- Keeping Parliament running during COVID-19. Parliament used online tools to stay active during the pandemic. Members joined meetings virtually while others attended in-person. The Standing Committees also held online sessions allowing public participation in debates, even from a distance.
- Reaching out to the People. The Civic Education & Media Unit worked hard to connect Parliament with the public. It used social media, websites and broadcast to educate people about Parliament. The Report suggests improving these efforts by using more vernacular languages and creating programmes for children and schools.
- Supporting Global Goals. Parliament showed its dedication to important issues like climate action, gender equality and poverty reduction. These aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals that are important for Fiji and the world.
- Challenges for Staff. The Report highlights the efforts of our parliamentary staff who faced many challenges during this time. They worked hard despite being under-resourced and dealing with the difficulties of remote work. Their dedication deserves our respect and gratitude.
- Managing Resources Wisely. Parliament is recognised for using its budget wisely. Completing important programmes while facing financial limits. The shift to online submissions for donor funding is an example of adapting to new methods with success.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the recommendations in the Report have already been acted upon or are being discussed. Parliament has improved its digital tools for public consultations, making it easier for citizens to participate. Parliamentary tours now focus on using vernacular languages to make them more inclusive.

The idea of having a Parliamentary Legal Counsel is being explored to strengthen legal support. These steps show Parliament's commitment to improving its work and serving the people better. I want to take a moment to praise the hard-working people in Parliament, whether they are Members debating laws or staff, ensuring everything runs smoothly, their dedication is inspiring. They faced many challenges, but they rose above them with resilience and determination. Without their hard work, Parliament will not fulfil its role for the people of Fiji. As we look to the future, let us use this Report as a guide. Let us continue to invest in the people who make Parliament effective. Let us ensure that every citizen feels connected to this institution, knowing it is here to represent and protect them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must emphasize that while we need to ensure Parliament is properly staffed and resourced, we must also hold ourselves to the highest standards whether it is how we dress, how we address others or how we conduct ourselves; we must always lead by example. Parliament is not just another workplace; it is the highest office in the land. The nation look to us for leadership and we must show them that we are worthy of their trust and respect. Parliament is more than a building; it

is a place where the hopes and dreams of our nation are shaped into reality. It is a place for debate, compromise and progress. It is a symbol of democracy and the promise of a better future.

The total budget allocated to Parliament for the 2024-2025 Financial Year is \$18.2 million. This budget is intended to empower Parliament to carry out its constitutional role as the legislative authority of Fiji. Yet we are facing a puzzling challenge. Why are essential resources for Members of Parliament and the staff, resources as fundamental as paper and other tools needed for our work being limited? Such restrictions hinder our ability to effectively serve the people who have entrusted us with this responsibility. As Members of Parliament, we are expected to perform at the highest level, delivering quality and impactful work. How can we meet these expectations when the necessary support and resources are constrained?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Parliament must be a leading example of excellence, not just in the decisions and debates, but in how it operates. It is imperative that we address these resource constraints and ensure that this institution has the independence and means to fulfil its mandate. The budget allocated to Parliament must be utilised effectively, with autonomy and respect for its purpose to equip Members and staff for their vital roles. Strengthening this vital institution, honouring the tireless efforts of its staff and ensuring it is equipped to meet the demands of the future, a professional and strong Parliament must remain at the heart of our democracy, free to serve every citizen with pride and purpose.

HON. F. S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Members of the Committee for the Report. At the outset, let me say, what was said before me by the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Virendra Lal is very pertinent and very important, and I agree with what they have said. There are a couple of things that have actually come out in the Report which are important, and I think one of the most important things that we must all realise, Mr Speaker, Sir, is this Parliament belongs to the people of Fiji. So, at the very foremost of our minds, we should say that we should be serving the people of Fiji, which means they must be kept well informed at all times.

I think one of the recommendations in the Report actually says that we have also gone through COVID, Mr. Speaker, and COVID has taught us many lessons. I think there is a good lesson that comes out of it and that is with respect to digitisation and getting things done digitally. I think Parliament needs to be budgeted well or given a good budget so that we can make use of things in a digital fashion more and more so that accessibility to the public is also there.

All the recommendations that actually came out, the second one spoke about the need for adequate public engagement via notification. This is not just relative to those particular years, but I think it is relative even now, that the notification we still probably lack a little bit. Maybe it is a budgetary constraint, I am not sure, so honourable Minister for Finance, I hope we are going to give Parliament some more money so that we can keep our public well informed. I think everyone is quite well aware on the consultation exercises that we go to, the participation sometimes is quite minimal and also they are not very well informed when they do appear. It is something that needs to be looked at and it is something that needs to be taken care of.

From a Parliament perspective, I think the Parliament staff do as much as they can, but a whole lot more can be done to keep the general public well informed and well engaged at all times so that we can do a better job in keeping them informed. I see the statistics that have come out with respect to the level of engagement. I think in these particular years, August 2020 and July 2021, we had about 20,000 active users of the Parliament website. I think it is a good comparison to go back to at that particular time, we are just out of COVID, and see what it is at the moment, so we need to do a study on why has it either slowed down or has it increased.

We had about 35,000 active users on the Parliament website in 2021 and 2022. We have 145,000- plus engagements on the Parliament social media platform. These are not small numbers. But what it does, Mr. Speaker, it does not actually reflect on the ground when we get on the ground as part of the Committees when we are doing consultations. It is sad to see sometimes because then you are not getting the full opinion of the general public in terms of us making submissions. That is something that probably needs to be addressed. Even though these are 2019-2020 and 2020-2022 Reports, it is something that is actually valuable for us to look at in terms of what it is now. The Ministry of Finance actually should consider maybe increasing the budget and looking at how we can actually digitally expand and how it is done in other jurisdictions around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Committees that actually do a lot of work, there are best practices that we need to adhere to that are similar to what happens around the world and these things also, the digital engagement that we can actually get done with respect to overseas jurisdictions is an important issue that probably needs to be also looked at. Sometimes I know, the benefactors of some of our development partners who engage with Committees, et cetera and send them out overseas to get the necessary training done, or upskilling, et cetera, not just the Committees, but all of our Parliamentary staff, but that digital engagement also is quite important for the Committee work. As we all know also, Sir, Committees within Parliament have now got extended legs and hands, et cetera there is a lot of work being pushed through to the Committees and I think that is important. And again, we are now back to face to face. We are no longer doing it digitally, but we must also be in a state of readiness at all times, having learnt the lesson of COVID-19. Again, it would be a digital exercise that would probably take care of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I agree with the recommendations that have been put through by the Committee with respect to those years, bearing in mind it was a very difficult time. Also, I want to take my hat off to all the Parliament staff who actually adhered to whatever they could and keep us going during COVID and post- COVID and also getting back into the swing of things. Now, we are in a better space and a better place with respect to actually all the activities that are carried on by Parliament and its staff. So, commendations to the Committee and also to Parliament staff, having carried us through COVID and right through up to now. I agree with the recommendations that have been put forward by the Parliamentary Committee, and I thank the Chairman and her Committee Members.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the motion that is before the House. I wish to contribute to the two key areas highlighted by the Committee on the Consolidated Review Report on the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2019-2020 and 2020-2022 Reports.

One is the establishment of a Parliamentary Legal Counsel. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted with concern the challenges faced by Parliament in obtaining timely legal advice due to the delay of the Office of Solicitor-General during its submission. Parliament confirmed that discussions had been ongoing regarding the establishment of an in-house parliamentary legal counsel. These discussions which began under the tenure of the former Speaker, His Excellency Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu involved collaborative talks between Parliament and the Ministry of Finance to explore the most viable path forward. The Secretary-General noted that while the idea remained a long term objective focussing on training in-house staff in legal matters, it is a critical step that will take time to fully realise.

To address this challenge, the Committee recommends that due consideration be given to the establishment of a Parliamentary Legal Counsel, which would provide timely and independent legal advice to Parliament, enhancing its legislative and oversight capacity and ensure that Parliament

maintains legal control over its legal service, reducing reliance on external legal offices and strengthening the institution's capacity to manage legal affairs effectively and independently.

Regional best practice of available guidance in Papua New Guinea, maintaining a dedicated Parliamentary Counsel Office that provides legal advice and drafting support for parliamentary functions, while the New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel Office operating under the Attorney-General plays a key role in legislative drafting, legal advising and ensuring a timely publication of our review laws. These examples show the dedicated legal support within Parliament that can significantly improve legislative quality and efficiency.

The second point, Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak on is the performance-based reward system. The second issue raised by the Committee concerned the Parliament performance-based reward system of the staff. Currently, Parliament continues to utilize the Annual Performance Agreement (MyAPA) mechanism to assess and evaluate staff performance.

While this tool is useful, the Committee has identified a major concern. Parliament's Performance Assessment System is not aligned with the Ministry of Civil Service. This lack of alignment is creating disparities in evaluation, limiting consistency across the wider Civil Service and may negatively impact efforts to build a unified Public Service culture. To address this, the Committee recommended that the Parliament:

- Align its performance assessment process with the Ministry of Civil Service;
- Implement robust mechanisms to assess and reward staff performance, including merit-based bonuses and increments;
- Establish clear transparent criteria for evaluations to ensure fairness and consistency; and
- Invest in a professional development programme to support staff growth and improve institutional capacity.

Once again regional practice provides strong precedent as seen in Vanuatu's adoption of the Comprehensive Performance Management System, the Solomon Islands Alignment in Commonwealth Parliamentary Benchmarks to improve governance and staff development, and New Zealand investment in training and capacity building to support professional and effective parliamentary operations.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, both the establishment of a Parliamentary Legal Counsel and the strengthening of the performance-based reward system are vital reforms that will contribute to the professionalism, independence and effectiveness of our Parliament. By aligning this best practice across the region and prioritising internal capacity building, we can enhance staff morale, improve legal responsiveness and ultimately deliver better services to our Fijian people.

I urge this House to give these recommendations urgent consideration and hope that Parliament works together towards the implementation and continue building a more efficient, transparent and accountable Parliament that truly serves the interests of our nation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker. Sir, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Report. I would like to thank the Committee for the work that it has done on the Report combining the two different separate reports into one, into a Consolidated Report, especially covering a time that was marked with a lot of difficulties in making sure that Parliament was able to run.

On that note, I would like to congratulate and thank all the staff of Parliament that worked very hard during those trying times. And I think, again, as we can still see today, they are still in trying

times. A lot of the staff here have two jobs, three jobs they are all doing, so I would like to take my hat off to all the hardworking staff of Parliament who have worked very hard to sure that Parliament is able to perform its functions. We support all their recommendations whole-heartedly.

The first one is about reviewing our civic education strategy, I am sure that that is something that we are looking forward, especially, I think, the last sentence of that is very important – “The Committee suggests that Parliament should undertake a survey on the effectiveness of these programmes.” For those of us, as the honourable Faiyaz Koya has said, we go on sometimes on Committee reports, we go to functions where we have consultations, sometimes there are very few people there, and sometimes people that do turn up do not know what it is all about.

I think there is an opportunity there for us to look at ways in which we can work within Parliament, within the resource that we have, perhaps working in tandem with other agencies in Government, such as the district advisory councillors, the provincial administrators, the *Rokos*, et cetera, to try to get that information across so that we target the right people, so that they can come to the consultations. We do speak ourselves as the house of the people, but the Committees do take out this and they would like to hear firsthand, sometimes it is a bit disheartening, sometimes when you are sitting there, and you have to explain what it is about. I think there is an opportunity there for that to be improved upon, and I think Parliament can look at how we can do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the second last thing that I will talk about is Recommendation 5. When people come to Parliament, they have a certain image of Parliament. We have noticed, for instance, sometimes when we have Committee reports and we have visitors, they stand around sometimes, there is nowhere for them to sit, and I think it does not feel all that good. I think it is something that we need to look at when we have consultations here, on the top floor there is furniture that is lying around. There needs to be a better way in which we can dispose that and also make sure that when people come for consultations here, that there is a place for them to sit, to relax, so that they can participate fully in the engagements that we have.

There are things on Recommendation 6 about the performance management system, and I am sure as a way of managing, I fully understand the difficulties that Parliament has gone through, through that particular period and the period that we have now in terms of staffing. I endorse Recommendation 6 about reviewing the performance management system. It is always important, when you are looking at performance, not just to look at your own performance, but to find someone to benchmark against. I think that is very critical. I realise that in this Report, it says that Parliament has chosen not to align to benchmark assessment processes with the Ministry of Civil Service. But I think good practice, you look at your performance, you look at the trends in your performance, and then third, you benchmark your performance against someone else. Hopefully Parliament can consider how we can do that benchmarking exercise, so that we can continue to improve.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Chair of the Committee again for the Report and all the honourable Members who have spoken before me, and the honourable Prime Minister as well. Just on the budget and the points that honourable Koya and honourable Usamate raised. I agree with honourable Koya that it is the day and age of technology, electronic communication, and the accessibility to Parliament of members of the public, very important. In this day and age of social media as well, we have different interpretations, different takes on what happens in Parliament.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I was in Opposition, this is the second term, and I met one of the university students. He said to me, “Sir, why do you not just support the Government every time you speak?” And I said, “I do sometimes, but sometimes we have to oppose Government policy,

we have to criticise them.” I realised that the question he was asking was really his understanding of what Parliament was. He thought it was all about Government, that everyone in Parliament, because the history of 14 years created that kind of environment.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the environment is completely different now and I am very pleased that the Parliament is more open, more transparent, there is more collegiality despite the debate we have inside the chambers. I think even the Opposition feels much freer and more open about the Parliament ecosystem now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that is a very good change. Under the section 37 (a) of the Financial Management Act 2004, all independent offices, including the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji should be adequately resourced to ensure that they independently and effectively exercise its powers and perform its functions and duties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this government in particular, in 2023, 2024 budget, we almost doubled the budget for Parliament from \$8 million in 2022-,2023 to \$16 million in 2023, 2024 budget, and the significant increase of \$7.7 million was to provide adequate funding for the upgrade of equipment to broadcast parliamentary sessions via multi language captioning system. Additional funding was also provided for political parties, allowances for honourable members of Parliament to be able to do work more effectively and be able to engage with communities and members out there in the public.

So, all that I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has also helped in the conduct and the visibility of Parliament, including the work that the Parliamentary committees do. In the 2024-2025 budget, we again allocated a further increase in the budget to \$18.2 million, of which approximately 70 per cent is allocated for operational expenditure and 12 per cent was earmarked for capital works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can see the improvement that was done, the renovations that were done and that itself, has created additional support to Parliament. I agree with honourable members that during COVID-19, it was a very challenging time for staff and members of Parliament. The Secretary-General was responsible for the management of the budget and the upkeep of Parliament.

I want to take this opportunity to thank her and thank all the Parliamentary staff for holding their heads high and making sure that honourable members of Parliament from both sides had a fair go and I must say Mr. Speaker, Sir, the staff, when we were in Opposition and it is the same as when we are in government, have been very fair and open to both sides of the Parliament, including Opposition and Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must say, that itself has created an environment in which we can all work effectively as members of Parliament.

The multi-language captioning system funded in the 2023 2024 budget, provides live broadcasting and captioning in three languages and that is one of the big decisions that the honourable Prime Minister and this Government and the former Speaker, His Excellency the President, now, decided that we should allow members of Parliament to speak in vernacular and provide the appropriate translation and I think the feeling out there is very good. I can see all of us, including Members from the Opposition, often choose to speak in *Hindi* or *iTaukei*. That is something that we should be very proud and very happy that we, as a multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-ethnic country, are able to include this at the highest level of decision-making, which is the Parliament. It is a tribute to the work of the leadership of this Government, which is the honourable Prime Minister and Parliament is a much more happier place now. One that is supportive of democracy and participation, and that is how we want this country to be in the future. The vision and the foundation has been laid very effectively. I commend the report to Parliament.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it just leaves me to say thank you very, very much to all the honourable Members who stood up to support the recommendations in this Consolidated Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2022 Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I also take this time to join the other honourable Members to say thank you to each and every gentleman and lady who calls this Parliament their workplace.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

A footnote to the discussion after all being said and done, I must confess, that as far as the technical support, including staff performance, in the years under review, I feel rather proud of my staff, ably led by the Secretary-General and her staff. Credit should go to my predecessors, including His Excellency the President, for their leadership roles.

There are issues identified in the reports and the recommendations therein. We hope we will be implementing them with the assistance of Government relevant authorities. We come under the honourable Prime Minister's supervisory role, and we look to the fourth floor for help and guidance.

### **CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT - NAUSORI TOWN COUNCIL 2016 TO 2018 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Nausori Town Council 2016-2018 Annual Reports, which was tabled on 11th March, 2025.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 1970 Nausori Town Council was a small municipality with two wards, Nausori and Davuilevu, on either side of the beautiful Rewa River. The Wainibuku River became the annual boundary that separated the Nasinu Town Council from Nausori Town Council. Currently, the Council covers four wards.

The brief significant key findings and recommendations were highlighted during the deliberation of the report and the site visit of the Committee. They were looking at the:

- (1) financial management report of the Council;
- (2) rate arrears that was owed by the ratepayers of the Council;
- (3) old market site development and its future development whether it is already on site, to develop further on the old market that is currently at the development side of the Nausori Town Council;
- (4) looking at the infrastructure development of the whole town and hopefully, with these findings and recommendations, the Council will anticipate the recommendation by the Committee to assist the Council in its service delivery to the people of Fiji and likewise improve its service delivery to its internal process.

With those few words, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- I open the floor for debate on the motion. I do not have the list of speakers with me.

HON. M. K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Consolidated Review of the Nausori Town Council Annual Reports 2016-2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry acknowledges the findings and recommendations outline to the Consolidated Review Report and we accept these 11 recommendations in the spirit of responsibility and a firm commitment to continuous improvement. I must thank the Chairman and the Committee Members for going through the report, even though it is an old report, but there are some lessons that can be learned from this report. Going through the reports, there are three major areas that are covered by this report.

- (1) the responsibility of the Ministry in providing oversight as well as monitoring of the municipalities.
- (2) the need to strengthen the internal control systems within the municipality; and
- (3) the need to improve some of the basic infrastructure and facilities within the Nausori Town.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this report provides not only a detailed overview of the Council's performance during a particularly challenging period but also highlights systematic weaknesses that have historically undermined municipal finance management and governance across several councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we recognise that these reports relate to a period nearly a decade ago, it remains critical to ensure that we learn lessons from this report. The preparation, submission of annual reports, and the consistent auditing of Council accounts are fundamental pillars of good governance and accountability, pillars which this Coalition Government is determined to reinforce.

Over the past 24 months, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has prioritised the completion of overdue audits and the submission of outstanding annual reports to Parliament. Since December 2023, a total of 14 Annual Reports have been tabled. This is a significant achievement that reflects our unwavering commitment to transparency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it must be acknowledged that many of the issues identified in these reports will persist across multiple reporting periods. This is a consequence of years to a reform systems and processes that were either inadequate or not seriously implemented. Prior to 2021, there was no policy foundation, and insufficient active monitoring of the Ministry largely built on resource and capacity constraints.

However, since 2024, we have taken decisive steps to correct this. A specialised Audit and Compliance Unit has been established within the Ministry to strengthen oversight, ensure rigorous follow-ups, and drive sustainable improvements in Council operations. These identified through our internal audits are being addressed with urgency and seriousness. We warranted special enquiries are conducted, and we have evidence that there is wrongdoing matters are being referred to the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption for further investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government is laying strong foundation for transparency, accountability, and genuine community engagement. Through regular meetings with residents and ratepayers, the Council is not only informing the public of the activities but are also actively involving communities in shaping service delivery priorities and future development plans. We believe this partnership with the public is essential for rebuilding trust and improving the quality

of services.

One of the very important issues that was highlighted by the Committee was the need to review the legislation that has been outdated and regulations hindering the effective operation of municipalities has been a topic of concern. The Ministry has collaborated with the Local Government of New Zealand for the review of the Local Government Act 1972. This is believed to enhance governance, transparency and service delivery by modernising municipal administration to better address contemporary urban challenges. A new Local Government Act will be a modern document that will take into consideration the developments that have taken place locally as well as globally.

My Ministry notes that the qualified opinion for the period 2016 to 2018 for the areas of concern, on categories of fees, charges and rental income, inventory category and value added tax. The Nausori Town Council began its digital transformation journey in 2022, focusing on strengthening internal controls to address existing challenges and enhance reporting capabilities that were limited by the previous manual system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ministry's audit and compliance team offers audit report and guidance, conducting compliance checks and audit. Their focus is on identifying gaps and potential issues early on and Mr. Speaker, Sir, the team has completed compliance checks for four councils and conducted three special audits, with plans to complete checks for the remaining nine councils by the end of the financial year.

The Office of the Auditor-General has completed the audit for Nausori Town Council for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2021 and will begin the audit for the financial year ending 31st July 2022 in the coming month.

My Ministry is also working closely with all the councils in formulating a reporting format, process and procedures. The council is also tasked to maintain appropriate internal control measures to address deficiencies in audit reports. The ministry, through a small audit team, ensures that municipal councils adhere to the relevant laws, financial regulations and standards related to financial management, urban planning, environmental protection, public health and safety.

Before I take my seat Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this time to thank the current administrators, the staff of Nausori Town Council for doing a great service to the residents as well as to the ratepayers of Nausori Town and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity to respond to this motion and I fully support the motion before the House.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the motion before us, which highlights the Consolidated Review Report of the Nausori Town Council's 2016 to 2018 Annual Reports. This report is an important step in addressing the challenges faced by the Council and ensuring that the people of Nausori receive the services they deserve. While I support this motion, I must also raise critical questions to ensure that the issues outlined in the report are addressed with urgency.

Let me begin with the redevelopment of the old market site. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this project has been in discussion for some time, yet we are still waiting for progress. While the asbestos has been cleared, the site remains undeveloped. The partnership with Shop N Save is promising, but the people of Nausori need clarity when will construction begin? What is the timeline for completion?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not just about a building. It is about creating a space that will benefit vendors, shoppers, and the entire community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, next, I turn to Ratu Cakobau Park, a place that stands as more than just a recreational park. This park is a vital part of Nausori's identity, deeply woven into the lives of its people. It is a venue where cultural, sporting and community events have brought together families and individuals from across the region. Memories have been created here, and communities have grown stronger through their shared experiences.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this park is especially significant to the people of Rewa, Tailevu and Naitasiri. It serves as a central hub for these provinces, facilitating events that reflect the vibrant spirit and values of the Fijian people. Whether it is rugby tournaments, soccer matches or other gatherings, Ratu Cakobau Park provides a space for unity, pride and celebration. Yet, despite its importance, the park remains in a poor state. Infrastructure is outdated and its facilities struggle to meet the needs of the community. What is more concerning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the looming expiration of its lease in 2028. This raises critical questions - what happens if the lease is not renewed; will the government step in to secure this important asset for the people of Nausori and the surrounding provinces? The future of Ratu Cakobau Park must be treated as a priority, not a secondary concern.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government needs to act decisively. This is not a matter of negotiation or delay. It is a matter of pressuring a cornerstone of Nausori's identity. The lease must be renewed and the park must be secured for future generations. By renewing the lease alone is not enough. The park deserves more than basic upkeep. It requires a modern and upgraded stadium that reflects its significance to the region. Imagine a facility that caters to athletes, spectators and families alike, a space that embraces technological advancements and offers accessibility to all a venue worthy of hosting national tournaments and cultural celebrations on a greater scale.

People of Rewa, Tailevu and Naitasiri have shown unwavering pride and support for Ratu Cakobau Park. They have carried its legacy for decades, but they deserve better than patchwork solutions. They deserve a stadium that evaluates their experiences, supports their ambitions and honours their cultural heritage. Ratu Cakobau Park is more than just a field. It is a cornerstone of our community, a place where memories are made and identities are celebrated. Its future must be secured not only through lease renewal but through transformational development. Let us ensure that Ratu Cakobau Park becomes a beacon of excellence that reflects the aspirations of its people and sets a standard for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to speak on the issue of rate arrears which currently stands at \$4 million. The financial burden directly impacts the Council's ability to deliver essential services like garbage collection and infrastructure maintenance. While strategies like payment plans and small claims tribunals filings are outlined, we must ask why these arrears continue to accumulate. The Council needs to explore innovative solutions to address this ongoing issue.

Similarly, the under-utilisation of Nausori's 50 open spaces is a missed opportunity. We see vague plans to transform some of these spaces into parks and recreational facilities but there are no concrete timelines. What is the Council's road map of utilizing these spaces to the fullest potential? Parks and courts are not just luxuries. They are critical investment in community health and engagement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another glaring gap in this Report is the absence of the former disaster risk management and business continuity plans. These are essential for a municipality vulnerable to flooding and other natural disasters. Droughts are reportedly underway, but urgency is key. Recent flooding in Nausori underscores the need for proactive measures, not just reactive responses.

On gender mainstreaming, while the Report celebrates equality in principle, the Council's actions in the main area remain limited. Projects like the UN Women's Accommodation Centre are commendable, but broader initiatives are needed to empower women in entrepreneurship and leadership.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Members of Parliament and the citizens of Nausori Township, I rise today with deep concern over the findings and recommendations presented in the Consolidated Review Report of the Nausori Town Council 2016 and 2018 Annual Reports. This document so diligently prepared by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs highlights critical failures and necessary reforms for a municipal institution struggling to meet its obligations.

I commend the Committee for its thorough analysis and strong recommendations for changes; recommendations we must act upon without hesitation. I also commend the honourable Minister for Local Government for the ongoing work in reviewing and aligning policies to improve systems and enhance performance of the various municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, among the concerns presented, none is more pressing than financial mismanagement and inadequate oversight. The staggering \$4 million in rate arrears is not just a number. It represents years of governance failures, collapse in collection efficiency, and a direct threat to the Council's ability to provide essential services.

Municipal finances are not discretionary funds. They are the backbone of service delivery. When fiscal accountability is compromised, everything falls apart - waste collection is delayed, parks remain neglected, and disaster preparedness is ignored. The Committee rightly emphasises that the Nausori Council will continue to suffer without strict financial protocols.

On essential action steps, there is a need:

- mandatory independent financial audit every six months to ensure proper compliance;
- introduce automated revenue collection systems to prevent future arrears accumulation;
- enforce financial accountability measures within councils;
- hold officials responsible for past negligence;
- strengthen the Ministry of Local Government's oversight; and
- ensuring rigorous monitoring of all municipalities.

These recommendations are not suggestions but necessary corrections to a failing system. As stated by the honourable Minister, works are ongoing to improve the Council's revenue collection.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee has also highlighted Nausori's infrastructure in a glaring issue affecting businesses, residents, and commuters alike. Conditions of blocked drainage systems, failing streetlights and some parts of the roads that are disrepair are also a testament of why financial mismanagement is so dangerous. It cripples the ability of municipalities to function effectively.

A solution here, Mr. Speaker, as already mentioned by the honourable Minister, the town council must work closely with Fiji Roads Authority to urgently accelerate repairs and maintenance. And as also mentioned by the honourable Minister, Government funding must be reallocated to assist in expanding garbage collection services in rural areas and recreational space such as Ratu Cakobau Park must be restored, ensuring they serve the community rather than becoming neglected sight of decay. I acknowledge the work currently taken to lift the status of Ratu Cakobau Park and I am sure

we will be seeing a state-of-the-art park in the near future. Thank you very much for the work done, this is in collaboration with the Ministry and the Nausori Town Council.

Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable that the Nausori Town Council lacks a disaster risk management plan. This is not merely a policy matter. It is about safeguarding lives, businesses, and homes from unforeseen disasters. The Committee has rightly recommended that the Council finalise its disaster risk management plan in accordance with the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024. Disaster planning is not optional. It must be prioritised along a business continuity plan, ensuring that municipal operations can withstand crisis. The time for discussion is over, the Council must deliver concrete emergency response strategies, in collaboration with government agencies and community stakeholders.

The Committee also addressed the growing concerns of drug abuse, loitering and crime, issues that undermine the social fabric of Nausori Township. While the Council has established an anti-drug stakeholders group, the response must be more aggressive. The solution lies in collaboration with stronger ties between municipal leaders, and law enforcement agencies must be established to drive crime prevention efforts.

Youth engagement programmes, including educational, sports initiatives, and skill-building activities must be launched to prevent young people from engaging in crime. Municipal policing measures must be considered to ensure public safety in high-risk areas. Crime is not just a legal issue, it is a municipal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Korovou halted urban development process is a disservice to the people of Tailevu North and maritime islands, who rely on this township for essential services. The Standing Committee has rightly demanded that the Government prioritise Korovou urban status and allocate resources for its proper upkeep. Development is not selective. Korovou must be treated as an integral part of Fiji's municipal framework, and financial investment must be directed towards its progress.

In conclusion, this review is not just a report, but a wake-up call. The work of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs has been instrumental in revealing what must be changed, enforced and prioritised. Their findings demand immediate implementation, and as elected representatives, we have no excuse for inaction. The people of Nausori deserve better governance, stronger leadership, and a municipality that works for them, not against them. Let us ensure that this debate is not just words but action. Let us deliver, reform and restore public confidence in Nausori Town Council. I support the motion before the House.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to support the motion that reviews the Consolidated Report of the Nausori Town Council 2016-2018 Annual Reports. Before I do so, I wish to reiterate what honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance mentioned about the overgrown shoulders. Some of the roads from Natuvu, Napuka, the Savusavu West Coast Road ....

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nath, you are speaking on this motion, not on any other matter. Keep to the motion may I ask of you.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

We will revisit the overgrown hedges on the roads some other time, but we keep to the motion, that is, on Nausori Town Council.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was reiterating what honourable Professor Prasad mentioned.

The Report highlighted both the achievements and the challenges faced by the Council, giving us a clear picture of where we must act. I want to start by addressing an issue that touches every person in Nausori – unpaid town rate. As of mid-2024, Nausori Town Council was owed \$4 million in arrears. This is a staggering amount; money that could have been used in fixing roads, clean drains, improve parks and maintain streetlights. Yet this money is missing because many rate payers have not fulfilled their obligation to the town.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the public needs to understand the simple truth. You cannot demand better service from the Council if you are not paying your rate. It is unfair to complain about these services or garbage collection when the Council is struggling to fund these services due to unpaid rate. Rates are not just a bill, they are an investment in our community. Every dollar paid goes towards making Nausori a better place to live, work and raise families.

The Council has tried its best to recover these arrears. It has offered payment plans, taken cases to Small Claims Tribunal and engaged directly with rate payers because these measures only scratch the surface of the problem. There needs to be a change in mindset. Paying rate is not optional, it is a responsibility. If you want a better service, cleaner street, well maintained park, we must all do our part. I urge the Council to explore innovative solutions to this issue, for example, creating more convenient way of payment, such as online platform, or mobile apps could make it easier for people to settle their dues.

Community awareness campaign could also help people understand how much their rate is being used to improve their towns. At the same time the Council must be firmer with those who refuse to pay. Unpaid rates are not just a number on the balance sheet, they are barriers to progress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while rate arrears are a significant issue, the Report also highlights other areas of concern. Let me turn to Ratu Cakobau Park which is another pressing matter. This park is a vital part of Nausori's identity. It is more than a recreational space, it is where families and communities come together to celebrate, play and connect, but as the report shows, the park is in poor state and its lease will expire in 2028. This is not a situation we can ignore, the Government must take action now and renew the lease to ensure that Ratu Cakobau Park remains a place of pride for Nausori.

Renewing the lease is not enough. The park needs to be upgraded. We need a modern stadium that reflects the importance of the space to the people of Nausori, Rewa, Tailevu and Naitasiri. This stadium should be a safer and welcoming venue for sports and cultural events and community gathering. The people have waited long enough. They deserve a park and a stadium that meets their needs.

The Report also raised concern about disaster preparedness. Nausori is prone to flooding yet the Council still lacks a finalised disaster risk management plan. National disasters can strike at any time and the Council must be prepared. A draft plan reportedly underway but they need to be completed and implemented immediately.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beyond this, there are challenges with garbage collections, street light repairs and road maintenance, particularly in rural areas. These are essential services that cannot be neglected. The Council must ensure that no one in Nausori is left behind. Despite these challenges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to recognise the progress that have been made, for example, the re-development of the old market site in partnership with Shop N Save is a step in the right direction.

Cleaning asbestos from the site was an important first step and the re-development will bring benefit to vendors, shoppers and the broader communities. The Council is also working on plans to develop its 50 open space into parks and recreation facilities. The space have numerous potential, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I look forward to seeing this transformed into a place where families can relax and children can play. As we consider this Report, let us remember that building a better Nausori is a shared responsibility. The Council must step up in its effort to deliver services, but the people must also step up by paying their rates, together we can ensure that Nausori becomes a town we can all be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to put to record, that a number of land adjacent to and or within Nausori Town are vacant State land. I hope they are used by the Council for future and better development. With that, I support the motion.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do acknowledge the report, as well as the recommendations by the Committee, together with the work, commitment and the initiative said by the Minister of Local Government on Nausori Town Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, strong and well-managed municipal councils are vital for thriving towns and cities. However, outdated legislation, the absence of elected leadership and financial constraints have hindered the ability to deliver. To address these challenges, Government has undertaken key initiatives, including the review of the Local Government Act, preparation of the Municipal Elections, and other measures to improve financial, sustainability, and development of Nausori.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current Minister responsible, has said, outline some of the work and initiatives that the Ministry is carrying out. Such as one on the Local Government Act 1972, which has served its purpose for the last 50 years, but no longer reflects the realities of modern urban management.

Our government has prioritised comprehensive legislative review to ensure municipal councils operate within a framework that is efficient, transparent, and responsible to today's challenges. The Government is restoring municipal council elections. The last election was held in 2005, and a lot has changed since then, including the population size of towns and cities. The Coalition Government has made it a priority to bring back Local Government elections, which is why we passed a Bill in 2023 to amend the Local Government Act and bring into effect this policy decision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current Minister is looking at a few key issues:

- (1) the rate arrears collection;
- (2) town boundary redefinitions, and
- (3) fee structures, that require decisive leadership.

Hence, it is important that we get the right people for the job that has been chosen by the people in their respective municipalities.

On rate arrears, Mr. Speaker, Sir, officers from the Ministry of Local Government indicated that the total Municipal Councils' arrears was around \$79.8 million, out of which Nausori Town Council has accumulated arrears of \$5.1 million. This is quite a large figure for a small municipality and majority of the default rate arrears are residential owners.

One of the other issues is the capability and capacity issue at the Nausori Town Council. That is to deliver on their mandated roles, functions, and responsibilities. This is a major concern due to the

current state of the financial affairs. The Government is doing its part. It has assisted Nausori Town Council from 2021 to 2025 with a total budget allocation of approximately \$2.8 billion to assist the Council. The Ministry of Finance remains committed to ensuring that the Council utilises its budgetary allocation efficiently and effectively, particularly in areas of importance such as waste management, infrastructure, service delivery, and disaster recovery.

There is development in Nausori Town, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is the \$20 million investment for the Nusori Plaza, which aims to generate more activities for the three provinces in Nausori. There is the public-private partnership between the Nausori Town Council and the Market Development PT Limited, a subsidiary of Shop N Save, which aims to involve the whole market site in Nausori.

Mr. speaker, lastly, an issue I wish to raise or highlight, which is not reported within the annual report is the audit accounts of the Nausori Town Council however, it was alluded to by the honourable Minister.

I wish to encourage all Committees looking at Annual Reports to also look at the organisations, agencies, ministries, audited accounts position. Because audited accounts position paints a picture about an organisation, management and staff as well as those in leadership, including our ministers. For Nausori Town Council, which comes under the Ministry of Local Government, in 2016 to 2018, I am not sure who was the minister then, according to the latest office of the Auditor-General audited report on Municipal Councils tabled in Parliament on 24 December, the 2019-2020 accounts audit was in progress.

However, as alluded to by the Minister, it is now completed and the 2021 to 2023 has been updated to 2021, and they fail in terms of timeliness as well as quality. It was given as with the other town councils, qualified opinion and for Nausori Town Council a disclaimer of opinion which is the worst level of qualification given to its financial statements. Disclaimer is normally given when sufficient appropriate audit evidence is unable to be obtained on which to base an opinion.

So, out of the 41 audited financial statements on 10 municipal councils. All were modified with or qualified with 25 financial statements for six municipal councils were issued with disclaimer of the opinion, including Nausori Town Council and if one had to go through the qualifications, one can see from 2016 to 2018, proper accounting records were not maintained. Sufficient and appropriate evidence could not be provided. These properties were not closed separately. No outstanding invoices were given to the auditors and a lot others including no appropriate reconciliation and supporting documents.

That was done by the previous administration. But now you have got a new management, the Permanent Secretary and the Minister as well, that are considering the issues that were raised by the Auditor-General, including putting extra funding and effort to clear the outstanding issues left behind by the previous administration. Without those long outstanding issues, the management and staff of Nausori Town Council, the Permanent Secretary and the Minister, would be fully absorbed into development and financial stability of Nausori Town Council. With those comments I support the report and the recommendations as well.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to talk about Nausori Town Council. We are aware that Nausori Town Council is basically serving three provinces namely Rewa, Naitasiri and Tailevu. Nausori Municipal Council is a very important council in terms of the number of people they serve, but unfortunately, the report says otherwise. And since the government side, likes going into history, I must tell them that when we actually started doing the audit of municipal councils, we started somewhere back around 2001, 2002, from 2015 onwards. So

it is not just an issue of a particular government in place but it is a legacy issue. And rightfully said by our Chairperson of Public Accounts Committee it has been an ongoing issue that needs to be rectified.

And, Mr. Speaker, with that note, I really feel for this honourable Minister who is leading municipal council at the moment because when municipal councils come and present before at least Public Accounts Committee most of the time they are referring to Department of Local Government under the Minister who is responsible of looking at it. But when we talk to Department of Local Government, they say that these councils are independent. They need to look after their own affairs. So there is a disconnect.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the reason why I am saying this, I urge the Government to hold the Local Government election as soon as possible is because of the appointment of the Special Administrators. We all know what has actually happened and transpired when these Special Administrators were appointed.

Just a few reports before this afternoon we were talking about openness, transparency, how people are appointed, but if you go to some of these municipal councils and if you actually ask for Special Administrators, some of the staff from the municipal council, they would say which one? One from SODELA, PAP or NFP and it is happening, Sir.

These kinds of appointments there is a huge disconnect because there is no job description. The Special Administrators they did not know where they are stepping on the foot of the CEOs. There is a lot of confusion. Sometimes the normal things that are supposed to be done by CEOs are handled by Special Administrators and this has been our recommendation as well in Public Accounts Committee that when we are choosing Special Administrators let us do it on merit. Bring in people who know what is to be done.

For the past two years we have seen nothing. No major development in Nausori Town Council. We did the bus terminals. We did the market, the space at the old market remains empty. The Syria park condition has deteriorated even further. I really do not know what the Special Administrators are doing. All they can do is put a state-of-the-art Christmas tree during Christmas last year and it was a laughing matter to all. The people of Nausori suggested it would have been much better not to do it, but when they do it people laughed at the type of work you actually do.

It was just a normal Christmas tree. The residents and the taxpayers they were laughing at it. I am still on Nausori Town Council. We are discussing Nausori Town Council.

Mr. Speaker, I met some residents of Nakasi over the weekend. They raised a very serious concern which I would like to bring to the attention of this august House and to honourable Minister as well. There is a new supermarket that was recently opened at Nakasi Road. This is nothing to do with Honourable Charan Jeet Singh. He has actually done his due diligence, gone through the process and he is trying to open his complex but what the residents there suggested that they had objected the opening of the supermarket in a residential area. But still, the Nausori Municipal Council has gone ahead to give approval for the operation of a fully-fledged supermarket, which is half supermarket and half I believe people are residing in that particular building which they were actually given approval.

The concern of the taxpayers is, if there was an advertisement to provide an objection, and if we did provide an objection, why did not Nausori Town Council listen to our objection and went ahead to give an approval to Alison Supermarket to operate the supermarket at Nakasi Road. There is something fishy going on. As I said, the residents there have actually objected. I urge the honourable

Minister to look into this as to how the approval was given by the Nausori Town Council and if something can be done about this.

Mr. Speaker, there is another scenario that I would like to bring in and this draws attention to a ratepayer and his name is Mr. Krishna of Chadwick Road, who has been running to council as some squatter residents have built an illegal footpath through his compound and council is not helping him to either fence his compound or remove the illegal construction that is the footpath, Mr. Speaker.

Even Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), without his consent, has given power supply to the residents who are living in the squatters and it is a legal requirement that if the EFL line crosses your compound, you need to get a consent. So without his consent, EFL has done it. Now, when he is running to EFL to get it removed, all he is actually getting is apologies. The first question is, how come these people were given the approval in the first place to run an EFL line over his compound, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, not just that, Mr. Krishna has been threatened as well by the perpetrators that do trespassing and they light fires at his backyard. He has gone to the police, he has lodged at least four complaints, but unfortunately the police are not helping him out. When he went to Nausori Town Council to request for an approval to fence his legal compound, he did not get an approval. This is a serious concern, Mr. Speaker, and I would like the honourable Minister to look into this as well.

I believe he had some discussion with the honourable Minister, and he has given some assurance that he will talk to the relevant authorities, and I also urge honourable Minister for Policing, if I can provide him with the complaint numbers, and if he can see what he can do with these complaint numbers, because these complaint numbers are backdating at least an year, year and a half old Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I suggested that Nausori serves the three major provinces of the country, and we need to actually focus. One more thing, we really need to look at Ratu Cakobau Park, because there is no other park that is available. We spoke about Coca-Cola Games, we know how sports-loving nation we are, and we need to actually secure that piece of land for the betterment of the nation.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank all the honourable Members who have contributed constructively to the debate of this Report. The Committee is looking forward to the recommendations and implementation, which will assist the Council in its service delivery to the people that they serve. On that note, Sir, I commend this motion before the House.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting today. I thank you all for your presence and contributions. Parliament is adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.24 p.m.



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**Reply to Written Question No. 25/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education  
(Ref. Pages 629 and 630)**

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**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION  
(Hon. A.M. Radrodro)**

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Reply to Question No. 25/2025 asked by honourable P.D. Kumar is as follows:

**Response:**

- (1) In the 2023-2024 budget the Coalition Government introduced the Hardship Assistance Scheme to support the private students with good academic performance but facing financial hardship. The entry requirement at the inception was that a student should have completed first year of studies privately with an academic achievement of 65 percent of Grade Point Average (GPA).
- (2) Moreover, in the 2024-2025 budget, the entry requirement for onboarding has been changed from 65 percent GPA to 50 percent pass rate. This is now aligned with the continuity requirement for Year I students on scholarships. Further scheme has been extended to TVET students at Diploma level in comparison to funding of degree students only in 2024.
- (3) A total of 781 students benefited from the Hardship Assistance Scheme so far, as 329 students came onboard in 2024 and 452 started in 2025.
- (4) TSLS will open the application for the Hardship Assistance Scheme for Semester 2 intake to allow those students who have completed Year I privately and have obtained a pass rate of 50% to be assisted from Semester 2 of 2025. There would be some students who will complete Year I of their studies by the end of Semester I and may come on board under the Hardship Assistance Scheme from Semester 2. The total number of students under this scheme will increase after completion of the intake for Semester 2.
- (5) Till date, a total of \$3,477,852 has been utilised in the current financial year of the allocated \$5.9 million for Hardship Assistance Scheme which is 59 percent. The number of students assisted under the Hardship scheme is based on the applications received and processed based on the eligibility criteria.
- (6) The Coalition Government will continue working with TSLS on innovative scholarship policies to ensure maximum return from taxpayer investment in the education sector.

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**Reply to Written Question No. 26/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 630)**

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**MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATERWAYS**  
**(Hon. V.T.T.K. Rayalu)**

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 Reply to Question No. 26/2025 asked by honourable J.R. Vocea is as follows:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is actively engaged in numerous projects to enhance the waterways, improve drainage and irrigation, and mitigate flooding and climate-related risks.

In the 2024/2025 financial year, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways has been implementing nine work programs nationwide worth FJD16.65 million and four donor projects worth FJD480,000. The total budget is worth FJD17,131,000.00 (*Annex 1*). These are categorized as follows:

A. The Drainage and Flood Protection Program includes eight riverbank stabilization projects, which are to benefit the general public at the following locations:

- (1) Sawani Village, Naitasiri - \$280,000.00.
- (2) Matainoco Village Rewa - \$300,000.00.
- (3) Naivilaca Village, Rewa - \$350,000.00.
- (4) Bualomanikoro Village, Bua - \$80,000.00.
- (5) Waciwaci Village, Lakeba - \$250,000.00.
- (6) Yavusania Village, Nadi - \$200,000.00.
- (7) Naviyago Village, Lautoka - \$280,000.00.
- (8) Mavua Village, Nadroga/Navosa - \$50,000.00.
- (9) Navakaka Village, Cakaudrove - \$270,000.00.

B. The Coastal Protection Program comprises nine projects to benefit those living in:

- (1) Ovea Village, Tailevu - \$650,000.00.
- (2) Nasilai Village, Tailevu - \$50,000.00.
- (3) Lakeba Hospital, Lakeba-Lau - \$281,620.00.
- (4) Nawaisomo Village, Beqa - \$241,022.75.
- (5) Navolau 1 Village, Ra - \$200,000.00.
- (6) Somosomo Village, Taveuni \$30,000.00.
- (7) Marou Village, Yasawa - \$50,000.00.
- (8) Ketei Village, Totoya – Lau -\$250,000.00.
- (9) Navunievu Village, Bua - \$70,000.00.

The Watershed Management Program, the Ministry has commenced the construction of the Qalinabulu Creek Flood Retention Dam in the Upper Ba River Catchment worth \$350,000.00. Complementing this, the River Dredging Program is nearing completion of three kilometers of the Ba River Mouth Channel worth \$6,508,745.00, with 373,000 cubic meters of silt removed to mitigate flooding.

The Irrigation Support for Farm Development Program, 15 irrigation kits have been distributed worth \$138,000.00 to farmers in the Western, Central, and Eastern Divisions to combat drought. Additionally, a Gravity-fed Irrigation Dam has been completed at Vola Settlement, Cakaudrove, worth \$69,000.00.

The Maintenance of Rice Irrigation Schemes Program has serviced seven out of eight existing schemes:

- (1) Navua Rice Scheme - \$21,428.57.
- (2) Dreketi Rice Scheme - \$21,428.57.
- (3) Nasarawaqa Rice Scheme - \$21,428.57.
- (4) Korokadi Rice Scheme - \$21,428.57.
- (5) Droca Scheme - \$21,428.57.
- (6) Bua Scheme - \$21,428.57.
- (7) Vunivau Rice Scheme - \$21,428.57.

The Maintenance of Drainage Systems (Non-Municipal) Program falls under the purview of the re-established Drainage Boards.

**The Central Division Drainage Board** has completed works at:

- Korovisilou Village, Serua Province - \$39,600.00.
- Military Ground, Bayview Heights - \$11,500.00.
- Dreketi, Rewa - \$42,228.00.
- Namara, Tailevu - \$13,476.00.
- Serua - \$1,380.00.
- Matainavuso Creek, Tailevu - \$29,670.00.
- Sauniwaqa, Rewa - \$23,000.00.
- Koronivia \$18,975.00.

**The Northern Division Drainage Board** is currently working on the:

- Flood gate installations at Novoalau, Malau, Korovatu, Nagigi, Wailevu, and Soasoa - \$94,500.00.
- Desilting works at Vuniyalayala, Waikisi, Sarava, Kelikoso, Bocalevu, Qelewaqa, Belego, Nabua Area 2, Droca Area 2, Korotari Area 2, Korokadi Areas 1 & 2, Valelawa Area 1, Dreketi Stage 2, Nasarawaqa, and Dreketi Irrigation - \$232,150.00.
- Earth-bund seawall upkeep at Wailevu, Tiri, Soasoa, Nagigi, and Naleba - \$7,000.00.

**The Western Division Drainage Board** is conducting drainage improvements at the:

- Raviravi, Navatu, and Togalevu (Ba) - \$50,337.00.
- Solovi, Nadi - \$35,088.00.
- Nabuna, Toko, and Balata (Tavua) - \$60,078.00.
- Caboni, Rakiraki - \$10,350.00.
- Drasa and Naviyago (Lautoka) - \$67,803.00.
- Lomawai Scheme (Sigatoka) - \$47,633.00.

As a result of delays in the tender process for machinery hire contracts in the Northern, Central, and Eastern Divisions, the Drainage for Rural Residential and Drainage for Farmlands Programs were exclusively implemented in the Western Division this year. These contracts are expected to commence smoothly next financial year.

The Rural Residential Program covers:

- **Sigatoka:** Vunikavika Settlement, Naqalimare, Rakirakilevu - \$13,147.00.
- **Nadi:** Nasau, Wailoko - \$12,075.00.
- **Lautoka:** Buabua - \$7,081.00.

- **Ba:** Togalevu, Sigave, Mataniqara, Votua - \$16,272.00.
- **Tavua:** Vanuakoula, Tavualevu, Nabuna, Balata, Nasivi, Natawa, Korovou - \$61,978.00.
- **Rakiraki:** Namara, Matawailevu - \$70,035.00.

The Farmlands Programme includes:

- **Sigatoka:** Naqalimare Village, Tonuve, Nadrala, Muka, Ciri, Jubeirata, Waibogi Settlement - \$64,497.00.
- **Nadi:** Naisoso, Naboutini, Nawaicoba - \$32,602.00.
- **Lautoka:** Buabua - \$3,519.00.
- **Ba:** Busabusa, Varoko - \$12,420.00.
- **Tavua:** Vanuakoula, Mataniwai, Nabuna - \$41,601.00.
- **Rakiraki:** Rarapatu, Rukuruku, Qalau, Penang, Waimicia, Malau, Colasi, Volivoli - \$70,495.00.

These initiatives are vital to addressing both immediate and long-term challenges in water management and agricultural productivity. Funding for the current financial year includes:

- (a) 97.19 percent of projects (126 total) which were locally financed - \$16,650,000.00; and
- (b) 2.80 percent (4 projects), which were donor-supported (KIWA initiative and Soqosoqo Vaka Marama) - \$480,000.00.

These include:

A. Nature-based seawalls: -

- (1) Navolau No. 1 Village; and
- (2) Somosomo (Kiwa Initiative Program).

B. River Bank protection works: -

- (1) Yavusania Village, and
- (2) Marou Village Coastal Protection project (Soqosoqo Vakamarama ni Yasana o Ba).

The Ministry is finalizing a USD 5.2 million grant agreement with SPC (*Annex 2*) through the Adaptation Fund Project for the “**Strengthening the Adaptive Capacity of Coastal Communities of Fiji to Climate Change through Nature-Based Seawalls**”. This will fund 14 Nature-based Seawalls at:

- (a) **Nadroga/Navosa Province:** - Tagaqe Village and Nabila Village.
- (b) **Ra Province:** - Nayavaira Village, Nayavutoka Village, and Saioko Village.
- (c) **Macuata Province:** - Qaranivai Village, Soqobiau Village, Visoqo Village, and Namama Village.
- (d) **Cakaudrove Province:** Saqani Village, Sese Village, Tawake Village, and Loa Village.
- (e) **Lomaiviti Province:** Nabuna Village, Koro Island.

The Ministry is dedicated to maintaining transparency and efficiency, ensuring that all project updates are accessible to the public via our official portal.

Additionally, regular progress reports are provided to Parliament, and I invite Honorable Members to visit the project sites to witness first-hand the developments carried out.

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**Reply to Written Question No. 27/2025 tabled by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance & Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics (Ref. Page 630)**

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**MINISTER FOR FINANCE  
(Hon. Prof. B.C. Prasad)**

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 Reply to Question No. 27/2025 asked by honourable P.D. Kumar is as follows:

- A. The redeployment process is a standard feature of our budget system, ensuring operational flexibility in budget execution, while maintaining transparency and accountability within a proper legal framework.
- B. In any financial year, if ministries are unable to meet the unbudgeted or unforeseen commitments from within their respective budgets, there is a provision in the Financial Management Act 2004 (Act) that enables the redeployment of available balances from other ministries to fund unbudgeted or unforeseen commitments.
- C. The legal authority to redeploy funds in the Budget is provided under section 22 of the Act as follows:

*“Section 22 Redeployment of appropriation”*

*The Minister may, with the approval of Cabinet, authorise the redeployment of amounts appropriated by the Appropriation Act in force for administration by the Ministry to the heads of appropriation and appropriation categories to be administered by one or more other budget sector agencies.*

*The Minister may authorise the redeployment of amounts appropriated by the Appropriation Act in force for administration by a budget sector agency (other than the Ministry) to the heads of appropriation and appropriation categories to be administered by one or more other budget sector agencies.”*

**Breakdown of Redeployment in the 2024-2025 Budget**

- D. For the 2024-2025 Budget, the redeployment exercise amounting to \$28,087,026 was undertaken to address additional expenditure demands for the following Ministries:
- (a) Ministry of Education - A sum of \$23,000,000 has been redeployed to supplement the Transport Assistance allocation under the Ministry of Education.

Following a fare review by the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission which took effect on 1 September 2024, student fares were adjusted to align with adult fares. To ensure that families are not financially impacted, the Coalition Government, committed to fully subsidizing the additional costs, requiring an additional \$23.0 million to cover these subsidies.

In the 2024-2025 Budget, \$37.0 million was allocated for student transport based on the old fare structure. However, the implementation of the new bus fare rates necessitated an additional \$23 million to fully cover the cost of bus fare subsidies for the blue and yellow cards effective from 1 September 2024.

The increased costs were not included in the initial budget as the fare review was made after the 2024-2025 budget was finalised. Given the importance of transport assistance for students, Government had to prioritise funding through redeployment.

- (b) Ministry of Local Government - The Ministry of Local Government has encountered a budget shortfall of \$4,087,026 for the Completion of Govind Park in Ba.

The first phase of the project, which began in 2018, involved the construction of the pavilion with a total cost of \$4,910,241 and this phase has been fully completed.

The second phase of the project, which is currently underway is expected to be completed by this year. However, the initial allocated \$2.0 million for this phase has been fully utilised, leading to a shortfall due to the following factors:

- (i) Uncertainty in Project Execution and Budget Utilisation Trends – Based on the historical budget utilization trends, the initial allocation was set as \$2.0 million to reflect a measured approach to funding. Previous years utilization patterns indicated slower spending as shown in the table below:

FY	Budget	Revised Budget	Actual
2023-2024	3,500,000	255,000	254,725
2022-2023	2,891,000	483,803	483,803

- (c) In addition, the Ministry of Local Government has submitted an unbudgeted request of \$1.0 million to supplement the \$500,000 already allocated in the 2024-2025 Budget for preparations of local government elections.

This additional funding will specifically cover logistical costs required for preparatory activities, including voter awareness, polling station setup and administrative support.

Given that the election is being considered for later in the year, it is crucial to commence these preparatory works now to optimise planning and resource allocation, ensuring a smooth and well-organised electoral process.

#### E. Summary of Redeployment

2024 - 2025 Redeployment of Funds: # 1					
From			To		
Activity	Project Name	Amount	Activity	Project Name	Amount
Various			Head 21 - Ministry of Education		
17-3-1-10	Ship Building Revival Project	3,000,000			
50-1-1-10	Merit Based Higher Education - Level 7 Local	10,000,000	21-1-1-6	Transport Assistance	23,000,000
50-1-1-10	Higher Education - Level 7 with Minimum. Cut Off Mark	10,000,000			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23,000,000</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>23,000,000</b>
Various			Head 37 - Ministry of Local Government		

17-3-1-10	Ship Building Revival Project	1,000,000	37-1-2-7	Local Government Elections Logistics	1,000,000
17-3-1-10	Ship Building Revival Project	1,000,000	37-1-2-10	Completion of Govind Park-Ba	4,087,026
40-1-1-10	Fiji Roads Authority	3,087,026			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,087,026</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>5,087,026</b>
	<b>Total Redeployment</b>	<b>28,087,026</b>		<b>Total Redeployment</b>	<b>28,087,026</b>

F. It is important to note that the redeployment exercise was not due to traditional project cost overruns but rather due to:

- (a) Government's new commitment to fund bus fare increases; and
- (b) Budget shortfall in the Govind Park project, where cost estimates were lower than actual completion costs.