

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**THURSDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER, 2025**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**THURSDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER, 2025**

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable K.K. Lal.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 5th November, 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 as we continue to serve the people and our nation. A warm welcome as well to those who were joining us in the gallery and to everyone watching the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for tuning in, staying connected and also being engaged in our parliamentary platform.

No Water - Parliament Precincts

The Secretariat and I who were on the verge of deciding to abort this morning's sitting as there was no water in and around the precincts, owing (I am told) to a burst water main along Waimanu Road. Happily, the Minister responsible, the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, came to the rescue and saved the day for us. So, let us make full use of the day.

**PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

Consolidated Review Report – 2022 General Elections Joint Report

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I am pleased to present the Committee's Consolidated Review Reports on the 2022 General Elections Joint Report by the Electoral Commission and Supervisor of Elections for the Multi-Observer Group.

As a result of the review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will highlight some of the key findings, the Committee has noted and this includes the following:

- (1) That the 20 recommendations by the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) and the additional recommendations made by the Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office have been reviewed and refined by the Electoral Commission and Fijian Elections Office and subsequently submitted to the Fiji Law Reform Commission as part of its proposed changes to the electoral laws.
- (2) That the Fiji Law Reform Commission has reviewed all recommendations by the Fijian Elections Office and the Electoral Commission, and that the outcome of these changes will be presented in Parliament.
- (3) That the Constitutional amendments are required to address some recommendations provided by MOG.
- (4) That there are concerns regarding the declaration document published by the Fijian Elections Office which could potentially be weaponised by a political party that wins an election.
- (5) That there is a suggestion to remove the ceiling cap for political party to receive donations which could infringe the independence of the party that wins an election.
- (6) That there is a suggestion for having a gender quota on political party candidates lists to encourage participation of women in elections.
- (7) That there is a need notion to have advanced public disclosure of election dates to allow sufficient preparation by voters and stakeholders.
- (8) That the Electoral Commission has decided to discontinue the mobile election results app and reinstate the media centre counting result.
- (9) That all references to Media Industry Development Act (MIDA) will be removed from the electoral laws.

At the conclusion of the review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee recommends the following:

- (1) That the Standing Committee will review any proposed changes made to the Fiji Law Reform Commission once the report is tabled in Parliament.
- (2) That safeguards be implemented to protect those donors listed in the declaration document published by the Fijian Elections Office which could be weaponised.
- (3) That there be an early date allocated for public disclosure of election dates to allow sufficient preparation time for voters and stakeholders.
- (4) Given the repeal of MIDA, it is recommended that there be a suitable replacement framework to be considered by Fijian Elections Office to ensure continued media accountability, transparency and fair access during elections.

In that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Members and the Alternate Members of the Committee for their deliberations and input, the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, Supervisor of Elections, and the representatives from the Fijian Elections Office who accepted the invitation and provided submissions that assisted in our work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee, I hereby commend and table the

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee, I hereby commend and table the Committee's Report on the Electoral Commission and Supervisor of Elections for the Multinational Observer Group 2022 Elections Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report - Auditor-General's 2019-2023 Audit Reports on Statutory Authorities, Independent Bodies and Commissions

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to present the Committee's Consolidated Review Report on the Auditor General's 2019-2020, 2021-2022 and 2023 Audit Reports on Statutory Authorities, Independent Bodies and Commissions.

This Report consolidates the following reports from the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji (*Parliamentary Paper No. 104 of 2021*), (*Parliament Paper No. 114 of 2023*) and (*Parliamentary Paper No. 184 of 2024*) on Statutory Authorities, Independent Bodies and Commissions, which covered the audit of 27 Statutory Authorities, eight Commissions and one independent body. So, all the responses are consolidated and condensed into a single report, which I am now tabling to this august House this morning.

In accordance with International Standards on Auditing, audit opinions are classified as either unmodified or modified. An unmodified opinion indicates that the financial statements comply with the applicable financial reporting framework and legislative requirements, with no material misstatements detected. Conversely, a modified opinion is issued when material errors, governance or internal control weaknesses, or insufficient supporting evidence affect the reliability of the financial statements. Modified opinions may be qualified, adverse or disclaimer, with the latter representing the most serious form of non-compliance and a key concern to the Committee's review.

The Committee noted audits of accounts dated back to 2003, as included in the consolidated Audit Report on Statutory Authorities, Independent Bodies and Commissions. It was also noted that while there have been periods of improvement in audit opinions, quality, timeliness and internal controls, the qualifications were not sustained over time.

The Committee observed that five entities received a Disclaimer of Opinion. The quality and timeliness of financial statements varied significantly among entities, with 73 percent assessed as unsatisfactory. Therefore, the Committee expressed serious concern over the number of pending audits, as well as the re-submissions of poor-quality draft financial statements, which continue to hinder timely completion of audits.

The Committee further noted several significant governance issues that warrant the attention of Parliament. These include the absence of formal Risk Management Policies, Disaster Recovery Plans and Business Continuity Plans, all of which are critical for effective oversight and operational resilience. It is also important to highlight that a substantial number of audits were delayed due to the following factors:

- (1) Delays in submission or incomplete submission or draft accounts for audit.
- (2) Delays in providing management comments.
- (3) Delays in returning signed audited financial statements for issuance of audit opinions.
- (4) Failure to provide relevant information or records to auditors in a timely manner.
- (5) Authorities opting to address issues raised in draft audit reports before re-submitting financial statements for audit.
- (6) According to certain entities, the delay in the timely completion of their audit reports was due to factors attributed by the Office of the Auditor-General.
- (7) Upon completion of the audits, certain reports were retained by Office of the Auditor-General awaiting the completion of other entities' audits to enable their consolidation into a single comprehensive report.

The Committee directs the heads of all entities to take full responsibility for addressing the audit issues identified and to implement appropriate corrective measures without delay. The Committee acknowledges, with appreciation that many entities have responded positively to the recommendations of the Auditor-General and have initiated strategies and actions to rectify the significant matters raised.

The Committee urges and recommends that the iTaukei Affairs Board and the Permanent Secretary responsible for iTaukei Affairs Board undertake concerted efforts to ensure that the accounts are promptly updated by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2026, if need be, allocating additional resources.

The Committee recognises and recommends the entities with consistent positive financial reporting over the last few financial years, with effective rating in quality and timeliness and with an unmodified opinion. These are Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji, Civil Aviation Authority Fiji, Consumer Council of Fiji, Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission, Fiji National Sports Commission, Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority, Fiji Teachers Registration Authority and Investment Fiji.

I extend my sincere appreciation to my fellow Committee Members for their diligence and commitment, especially to honourable Esrom Y. Immanuel (our former PAC Chairman), honourable Naisa Tuinaceva, honourable Alvick Maharaj, honourable Hem Chand and honourable Sachida Nand.

On behalf of the Standing Committee, I hereby commend and table the Committee's Report to Parliament this morning.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics;
- (2) Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection— two Statements; and
- (3) Minister for Agriculture and Waterways.

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

#### Update on Strengthening Fiji's Global Partnership

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all. I also send out greetings to those who may be watching the live stream at their homes or through other mediums, and we thank the media for taking to the public the proceedings from this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to update the honourable members on my recent engagement in October of 2025 and to report on the continuing work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which now includes external trade in strengthening Fiji's global partnerships and deepening our connection with Fijians living abroad.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, October was a month of significant diplomatic progress. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs, I have witnessed the consolidation of several key international partnerships - partnerships that directly support our national development agenda and our people, both at home and overseas. On 24th October, we launched the Australia-Fiji Governance Partnership, a four-year, FJ\$25 million initiative aimed at supporting civil service reform, accountability and democratic governance. The partnership complements our broader Public Sector Transformation Strategy and reinforces our commitment to integrity, professionalism, and performance across the public service.

Fiji has also continued to diversify its diplomatic and strategic partnerships. On 23rd October, I met with the Deputy Foreign Minister of the State of Israel, honourable Sharren Haskel, during her official visit to Fiji. This visit marked another milestone in the growing friendship between Fiji and Israel, coming just weeks after the opening of Fiji's resident Diplomatic Mission in Jerusalem.

A key highlight of the visit was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Israel's National Cyber Directorate on Cooperation in Digital Security and Cyber Security. The MOU establishes a framework for collaboration in capacity building, exchange of best practices, and threat and vulnerability assessments - all aimed at strengthening Fiji's resilience and digital space.

Israel's global leadership in cyber security brings invaluable expertise that will help Fiji build institutional and technological capabilities to counter emerging cyber threats. The MOU also opens new pathways for digital innovation, technology transfer, and capacity building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's solidarity with the people of Israel remains steadfast. I extend tribute to the courage and resilience of the Israeli hostages recently released through the 20 Point Peace Plan, a framework for humanitarian relief, recovery, and long-term peacebuilding. It is very interesting that the announcement from the U.S. President came hours after Fiji, in our national statement, as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) announced the Ocean of Peace Initiative that was signed by the leaders of the Pacific.

That milestone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the signing and entry into peace negotiations in the Middle East, and also our relationship with Israel, showed Fiji's enduring commitment to peace and security in the Middle East. I got a very happy call from His Excellency the President in the middle of the night announcing that he has had very successful meetings with the King in Abu Dhabi and they are willing to support Fiji, particularly with Fiji's profile in international peacekeeping operations. Fiji stands firmly in support of all efforts that advance peace, rebuild communities, and promote lasting security for Israel and its neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the august House and honourable Members of an important milestone in our relationship with the Republic of Vanuatu, our neighbour, a testament to our shared Pacific solidarity and the spirit of reciprocity in our policy of family first Pacific regionalism that underscores our Pacific Way that was introduced by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Director General of the Ministry of Lands of Vanuatu officially handed over to the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, the registered lease for a 44-acre property in Vanuatu, gifted to the Government and the people of Fiji. The site includes two existing buildings which can be utilised by Fiji for future diplomatic, cultural or community purposes. Vanuatu's generous gesture is made in reciprocity for the parcel of land that the Fiji Government has allocated to Vanuatu opposite My Suva Park, as well as in recognition of the deep friendship and mutual respect shared between our two nations.

This exchange not only strengthens bilateral relations, but also reaffirms our region's shared commitment to co-operation, mutual development and people-to-people links. The Fiji-Vanuatu partnership stands as a shining example of how Pacific communities and countries can advance common interests through understanding, generosity and unity of purpose.

**Celebrating Our Shared History and Cultural Connections:** Mr. Speaker, Sir, October has also been a month of reflection on Fiji's rich cultural heritage and diversity. In the second week, we celebrated Fiji's National Day; in the third week, we celebrated Diwali - the Festival of Lights; and last week, we commemorated the 170th anniversary of the arrival of the first Chinese settlers into these islands.

The influence of the Chinese community in Fiji extends well beyond the traditional narrative of trade and enterprise. Historical records trace the first Chinese settlers arriving into Fiji in 1855, and up until 1980 (two years after China's opening up to the world), all Chinese in Fiji and their descendants came from just one province, Guangdong, specifically the regions of Jiangmen, Zhongshan and Dongguan. Mr. Speaker, Sir, only after 1980 did the migration expand to the northern provinces. The historical impact of Guangdong province was very deep in the provinces of Lau, Lomaiviti, Kadavu and Naitasiri.

While at the ceremony or the celebration, you will notice that I held up a book written by a former dux of Queen Victoria School, Mr. Joe Bainivanua right through his school career, he was known as Joe Bainivanua. When I met him in Queensland, many years later, he told me in Sydney, it is alright to be Chinese and by then he was known as Joe Nata. I commend the book to all those

aspiring to succeed in life.

The influence of these early settlers, particularly from Dongguan is still seen in our food, customs, daily life - from the use of banana leaves in cooking introduced by Chinese settlers in Naitasiri and Tailevu, to the Chinese lollies that often accompany our yaqona sessions, reflecting the ancient Chinese medicinal practises to rebalance the body after kava consumption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even in our festive traditions, such as the use of firecrackers, trace their roots to Chinese customs symbolising the warding off of evil spirits. These influences, alongside those from our Indo-Fijian community, Pacific and Western communities form the cultural mosaic that defines modern Fiji - a nation of blended traditions, shared histories and collective pride.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, October was also a time of national reflection and unity. On 11th October, I joined thousands of our citizens at the Fiji Day celebrations in Liverpool, Sydney - hosted by our vibrant Fijian diaspora in Australia. I reminded those gathered that although they lived far from home, their hearts remain close to those of us in Fiji. Through their remittances, support for families and prayers, continue to strengthen our nation. In the first four months of this year, Fijians abroad remitted over FJ\$448 million, and annual remittances now consistently exceed FJ\$1 billion - a lifeline for thousands of people, hundreds of households in Fiji, and a pillar of our economic resilience.

During my visit to Sydney, I reaffirmed the Government's intention to expand essential service delivery to Fijians living abroad. The Fiji Government Service Roadshow, led by our High Commission in Canberra, in partnership with key ministries, brought services directly to our communities across Australia - commencing from the Northern Territory and continued to the states of Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory (ACT), and concluded in Western Australia.

Over the course of four weeks, from 25th September to 26th October, the Roadshow Team engaged with hundreds of Fijians in Australia, offering on-the-spot services: such as renewal of passports with the Ministry of Immigration, registration and issue of voter IDs with the Fijian Elections Office, registration in the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB) with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, printing of birth, death, and marriage certificates with the Ministry of Justice, and accessing services provided by the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF).

Our workers who are in Australia through the Pacific Australian Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme, also had the opportunity to meet with senior representatives from the Ministry of Employment, including the Minister and Permanent Secretary of Employment, to discuss or raise matters directly with our officials on the PALM Scheme. Mr. Speaker, Sir, members of the community expressed their deep appreciation for the opportunity to access government services without having to pay thousands of dollars to travel to Fiji for these same services.

I take this time to acknowledge the tireless efforts of our officials who travel from Fiji to support that initiative, as well as the Fiji High Commission staff in Canberra, community elders also across Australia, who volunteered to ensure the smooth execution of that exercise. Their professionalism and dedication to service and to the people reflect the value of public service that we uphold. The success of the roadshow underscores the importance of consistent outreach and engagement with our overseas communities, so they do not feel isolated or disconnected from home.

Further, I wish to commend the coordination between the Fijian Elections Office, Fijian Electoral Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and our diplomatic and trade missions abroad for facilitating voter registration for Fijians overseas. This collaboration ensures that every citizen,

no matter where they reside, can participate in our democratic processes and remain connected to Fiji. These initiatives form part of the National Diaspora Policy currently being developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in consultation with relevant agencies.

The policy aligns with Fiji's National Development Plans, and the initiative reflects our commitment to a people-centred foreign policy - one that ensures no Fijian, wherever they live, feels disconnected from home. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Foreign Policy is no longer confined to the international stage, it is a strategic tool for national development, connecting diplomacy to the everyday needs of our people.

The Foreign Policy White Paper 2024 and the National Development Plans share one vision: that Fiji's sovereignty, security, prosperity are mutually inclusive. Every partnership we forge - whether in governance, reform, defence cooperation or cybersecurity, contributes directly to our goals of economic growth, good governance and social cohesion. Fiji's diplomacy is therefore people-centred, development driven and anchored in the values of partnership, mutual respect and shared prosperity. Together, these reflect our determination to ensure that diplomacy delivers tangible benefits for our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we look to the future, our government remains steadfast in ensuring that Fiji's voice is heard and respected globally and that our citizens at home and abroad remain at the heart of our national progress. We will continue to deepen partnerships that strengthen our institutions, modernise services to better serve our diaspora and uphold our role as a responsible and compassionate member of the Pacific and global communities.

The handover of land from Vanuatu, the strengthening of ties with Israel and Australia, and our enduring cultural connections with our Asian partners all reflect a single truth, that Fiji stands as a bridge between cultures, a beacon of partnership, and a nation of peace and goodwill. That spirit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will continue to guide our diplomacy, our governance and our collective journey as one nation under God.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his Ministerial Statement and an update on strengthening Fiji's global partnership. Right at the outset, five things that have been mentioned by the honourable Prime Minister are very positive and obviously at the forefront of our foreign relations in terms of trade and assistance, et cetera.

To begin with the launch of the Australia-Fiji Governance Partnership, we must remember that one of the strongest, deepest commitments that we have with one of our neighbours has always been and will probably always be Australia. And this particular governance partnership that currently exists, with the Australian government is very important to Fiji's aspirations in terms of development, and also this being neighbourly, Sir.

This particular initiative, launched by the honourable Prime Minister in October 2025 has many key elements to it in terms of economic governance, democratic norms, and furthering some of the existing collaborations that we actually have with respect to, parliamentary support, elections, taxation, and statistics. I just wanted to highlight something, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of us have been part and parcel of the parliamentary support that is given by the Australian Government and it is at a phenomenal level.

We have witnessed firsthand how important it is, we have also witnessed firsthand how important it is to us as a Parliament in terms of the assistance that we get from the Australian government in terms of that particular kind of support - and that is just one part of it, a relationship built on many years of friendship, and I thank the honourable Prime Minister for furthering that with

this particular governance partnership that has been agreed to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I have a very short space of time, one of the other important issues is the Civil Service Reform that needs to happen. That forms a huge part of it, and I am sure, and hope we will get a lot of assistance from the Australian government in trying to reform our civil service to take it to an optimum level, because it is something that is important to us. The trips that has actually come about is currently with one of the Committees to be dealt with, that is going to be another big help to us. So, this particular agreement will mean that it will be a help to us to get that assistance from Australia.

One of the other things that was mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was the signing of the MOU on cyber security which is another area that is critically important to Fiji moving into what is now the next generation of cyber, so to speak, with AI, et cetera, that exists. I think this has actually been taken to another level by the Ministry that was responsible, and a big thank you, too, to the former Minister who was part and parcel of getting that strengthened.

I wish the new Minister well, who is going to be taking over that particular portfolio to ensure that our cyber security issues are dealt with because it is something that concerns us, and it is something that the rest of the world is grappling with at the moment. So, we must be on top of it and any assistance that they are giving to us, in terms of this particular engagement with the MOU with Israel is going to be helpful to Fiji.

The Government of Vanuatu is a very strong supporter of the region, or, in anything that we do, and I think we must also acknowledge the fact that we are also grateful that they look up to Fiji all the time. At every instance where we actually appear as a Pacific region, they are always looking at Fiji in terms of the way forward and how we do things. So, a big thank you to the Vanuatu Government for the generous handing over of the 44-acre property to Fiji to actually further our relationship with them.

In terms of the diaspora engagement, I am happy to hear about the policy that is being developed. Honourable Prime Minister, you may want to just spark somebody because there was assistance, I think, being given by the Commonwealth and the Secretary General to the Commonwealth had spoken about this particular issue in terms of the diaspora policy, because we must acknowledge that our diaspora contributes heavily to our economy in terms of remittances that come.

Just this morning, the honourable Leader of the Opposition actually reminded me that in the Philippines, the diaspora has a separate lane that they come into, in terms of, when they come in from wherever they are, whether it is in the Middle East or the Philippines, they have a separate lane for the diaspora to come in and be taken care of because they contribute so much to the economy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of recognition of the Chinese community, and it is important that we do that, China has been a friend to Fiji for many moons, as they say - they have stood by our side, have supported us always through thick and thin, and I think the community here has contributed heavily to it.

Just to end on a lighter note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the late Mr. Dixon Seeto was a heavy contributor to the Fijian economy in terms of his intellect, et cetera. I joked with him one day, and I said to him, "Dixon, what happened to all the tall Chinese? I think we ended up with all the short ones from the region that you come from" - he actually swore at me. Nevertheless, I think it is important that we acknowledge the Chinese community's contribution in Fiji - the Chinese themselves have never left us, they continue to support us, it is important that we acknowledge them and I thank the honourable Prime Minister for acknowledging them, because we are friends to all and

enemies to none, and I think that stands us in good stead in terms of the Ocean of Peace. The whole world looks at us as a peaceful country, and everything and anything that we do is at the forefront of it.

I would like to acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister's Statement, with respect to the President and the meetings in Abu Dhabi. Everyone looks at us because of our peacekeepers, and they have actually flown the flag for Fiji. Peace is at the forefront of Fiji, everything Fiji does with respect to foreign affairs. I thank the honourable Prime Minister for his statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- If I may just pick up on a strand of the honourable Prime Minister's statement, my own personal footnote on the Chinese influence of the islands. Yes, Prime Minister, quite a few of our early settlers spread into our outer islands, especially the Lau Group, including my own at Kabara.

In fact, my own family connected with a Chinese trader - he married one of my great-great-aunties and their children and grandchildren are now serving our country, both here and abroad. Much in the same way as the Mr. Joe Mar, as you had mentioned growing up in Naroi, Moala. Now, they form the backbone to my people's development which we are so grateful for.

#### International Rural Women's Day Celebration

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament. Today marks "Thursdays in Black," a global campaign initiated by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the 1980s to peacefully protest and challenge attitudes that causes rape and violence. I once again rise in this august House to urge women who may be suffering, to reach out for assistance and call the toll-free number 1560. You are not alone in your suffering.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today I rise to honour our rural women. Rural women are the backbone of our economy and the heart of our nation. They are farmers, caregivers, traders and innovators. They feed families, run businesses and sustain communities. This government believes that a nation cannot prosper if its rural women are left behind and under the Coalition Government, we are making every effort to ensure inclusivity.

The International Day of Rural Women, observed annually on 15th October, honours the women who sustain our lands, our families and our future. This year's theme – "*Strong Women, Strong Families, Strong Communities: Ending Violence, Promoting Health and Building Drug-Free Futures*" - powerfully reflects Fiji's national commitment to gender equality, resilient livelihoods and inclusive development. We commemorated World Rural Women's Day across the country with inter-agency collaboration among government ministries, civil society organisations, and local communities in promoting gender equality, health and rural development. Each of these events enhance public awareness on domestic violence, disaster resilience, legal education and sexual reproductive health.

In the Central Division, our Ministry partnered with Naitasiri Women in Dairy Co-operative and Women's Fund to honour women farmers and provided inter-agency services including health and access to justice. They even brought together women's representatives from 16 districts, and 20 villages along with nine stakeholder organisations that participated in the celebration - this was held in Vunidawa. I thank Fiji Red Cross, Ministry of Health, Empower Pacific, Naitasiri Provincial Council, Fiji Police Force, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Fiji Women's Fund, Lazel Lawyers for provision of a range of services for women of Naitasiri.

In Namosi, the commemoration was extra special as it was held during the season of Nanai and was collected for display. There were also plans to cook, but I think something happened there and the bag walked away. They were even supported by Ministry of Agriculture, Legal Aid Services, National Fire Authority, Fiji Police Force and Medical Services Pacific honoured the invaluable role of rural women in agriculture, food security and community development. Women from 14 villages of Naraiyawa, Wainimakutu, Naqarawai, Salidrau Waivaka, Wainilotulevu, Nasoqo, Namosi, Wainiyavu, Navunikabi, Vunidavo, Burotu, Namuamua and Nukusere attended the event - reflecting a strong community interest in need for services in rural areas for women's empowerment.

Women benefited from financial literacy and agriculture programmes. They received information on HIV and STIs, reproductive health care, gender-based violence and legal aid services. Fire Authority was also there and provided drills and tips for prevention of fires in homes. More importantly, it fostered inclusive participation by encouraging women and girls to take on active roles in community decision-making and leadership.

In the Eastern Division, our Ministry reached out to Vanuabalavu, Gau, Batiki and Nairai. Promoting sustainable livelihoods, healthy living and resilience. About 200 women from five districts benefited from workshops in food security, financial literacy and online safety awareness programmes.

In the Western Division, awareness sessions in Lewa Village in Nadarivatu focused on access to justice, health and social protection services benefiting around 100 women from Tikina of Savatu also with inter-agency service delivery. I wish to thank the Deputy Speaker, honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for her presence at this event, and for taking the time to listen to our women.

For the Northern Division, the Ministry hosted a three-day REACH programme from 15<sup>th</sup> October to 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2025, at Saolo Village in Bua and commemorated Rural Women's Day, Day for Eradication of Poverty and International Day of Older Persons. The three-day event in Saolo Village was a platform for Government to bring its services directly to rural communities, where accessibility can often be a challenge due to distance and geography.

Over the course of the three days about 400 individuals from 29 surrounding villages representing the Tikina of Bua - Solevu, Wainunu, Kubulau and Nadi in the Province of Bua attended the programmes. For many of these Fijians this was the first time they were able to access a range of Government services and information all in one place. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the success of this event was made possible through the strong collaboration of 27 stakeholders from across Government, statutory agencies, financial institutions, and civil society and the private sector.

I wish to acknowledge the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources for opening the event, and also the honourable Minister for Agriculture for officiating the closing at this programme. I also wish to thank all the agencies who made time to join our team providing their services including:

- Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations;
- Ministry of Fisheries;
- Ministry of Civil Service;
- Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways;
- Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources;
- Ministry of Youth and Sports;
- Ministry of Health and Medical Services;
- Ministry of Justice;
- Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport;

- Ministry of iTaukei Affairs;
- Reserve Bank of Fiji;
- National Fire Authority;
- Water Authority of Fiji;
- Consumer Council of Fiji;
- Online Safety Commission;
- Biosecurity Authority of Fiji;
- South Pacific Stock Exchange;
- Fijian Elections Office;
- Fiji Development Bank;
- Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute;
- Vodafone Fiji;
- Medical Services Fiji;
- Fiji National Provident Fund,
- Fiji Police Force;
- Diagnostic and Special Medical Centre; and
- Fiji Pine Limited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, such a broad collaboration is a testament to the power of partnership and whole-of-Government coordination. It demonstrates that when agencies work together, we are able to deliver integrated, efficient and people-centred services to the most underserved.

During the event, the people of the five *Tikina*'s accessed a wide range of services. Amongst the most sought were the services provided by the Ministry of Justice, which included:

- Printing of birth, death, and marriage certificates;
- Registration of new and late births and deaths;
- Conducting court marriages;
- Printing of Vola ni Kawa Bula certificates;
- Title searches, trust registrations, and business registrations; and
- Assistance from Justices of the Peace for document certification and legal advice.

Other services provided included:

- Applications for social protection allowances;
- Information on women's grant support programmes;
- Medical screenings for breast cancer, cervical cancer, NCDs, and HIV;
- Voter ID registration and updates by the Fiji Elections Office;
- Applications for water tanks under the Rainwater Harvesting Initiative;
- Fire safety demonstrations by the National Fire Authority;
- Consumer rights awareness by the Consumer Council of Fiji; and
- Information on the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme to support overseas employment opportunities.

A highlight of the event was the financial literacy training conducted by the Reserve Bank of Fiji with 60 rural women successfully completing the programme and receiving certificates. This training provided valuable knowledge on budgeting, savings, small business management and the importance of financial independence - key tools for women's empowerment and financial resilience. The event also featured free medical check-ups provided by the Diagnostic and Special Medical Centre for recipients of the Ministry's Social Protection Programmes. This service was highly

appreciated by the elderly and persons with disabilities who attended.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beyond service delivery, the programme also served as a platform for listening. Our officials from across the Government ministries were able to hear directly from our people about the challenges they face, access to justice, gender-based violence, poverty or infrastructure gaps. These consultations help inform future policy and programme design, ensuring that decisions made at the national level are grounded in the realities of those on the ground. While 15<sup>th</sup> October draws attention to and honours our rural women, our Ministry will continue to deliver the services to our rural women through women's forums across the country throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the hard-working staff of our Ministry for using the days of commemoration to reach out to the rural women across the nation with the support of our partner agencies. May God bless our women living in rural areas across Fiji.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to acknowledge and thank the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection for providing this ministerial statement on the update of the World Rural Women's Day celebration, observed globally on 15<sup>th</sup> October.

The gravity of this occasion demands the attention of every member of this esteemed august House. As for the ministerial statement rightly notes, the women of our rural areas are the pillars who sustain our lands, our families and our future.

I commend the choice of the theme: “*Strong Women, Strong Families, Strong Communities, Ending Violence, Promoting Health and Building Drug-Free Futures.*” This theme is powerful and reflective of the core national challenges we face, particularly in our grassroots communities.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the true measure of our commitment is not in the strength of our theme, but in the effectiveness of our action. The ministerial statement highlights the national commitment to “resilient livelihoods” of our rural women. Coming from a background with a deep interest in the agricultural sector, I must press the Minister for more detail on this critical point.

Our rural women are often the primary labourers and decision-makers in farming and fishing activities. The question before us is this - beyond the celebration, what concrete, costed measures has the Ministry put in place to ensure these livelihoods are truly resilient? Have the women's groups engaged through these celebrations been connected directly to the Ministry of Agriculture for training in climate-smart farming and diversification? What is the specific budget allocation to provide rural women's cooperatives with modern, efficient post-harvest technology to reduce losses and increase market value? Are we ensuring equal access to financial resources and business opportunities for these women to compete effectively in our local and export markets, thereby eradicating the poverty that often marginalises them?

We must shift from awareness of “resilient livelihoods” to the tangible delivery of economic infrastructure. If we fail to secure the economic independence of rural women, her family and her community will remain vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statement refers to the events having “enhanced public awareness” on issues like domestic violence, drug abuse prevention and legal education. While collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and communities is laudable, the tragic reality is that incidents of violence against women remain devastatingly high, with nine lives lost this year alone in intimate partner violence cases.

This begs the question, how does the Ministry measure the success of enhanced awareness? Has the number of reported cases of domestic violence or drug-related offences in the communities listed decreased after the celebration? Or, conversely, has the increase in reporting, which is a sign of trust, been recorded? Are the educational materials produced through this inter-agency effort readily available in vernacular languages year-around, or are they confined to the celebratory period?

We need to know what specific support has been provided to the police and justice system to ensure that legal education translates into a justice system that treats violence as a priority and not just another case file. The systemic failure to protect women cannot be solved by a single day of celebration. It requires robust, survivor-centred laws and continues, well-funded support systems like shelters and hotlines. The awareness must be linked to immediate and effective help.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministerial Statement is a positive step in acknowledging our rural women. However, my duty as an honourable Member of this august House, and an advocate for rural development is to ensure that the words of the statement are matched by transparent and continuous government action. I call on the minister to provide a detailed follow-up report outlining the measurable outcomes from the awareness campaigns and the specific economic policies implemented to support the “resilient livelihoods” of the women engaged through this celebration.

We, in this august House, regardless of political affiliation, stand united in our determination to empower our daughters, sisters and mothers. I pledge my continued commitment in my capacity as a Member of Parliament to scrutinise the implementation of policies that ensure, every rural Fijian woman has the opportunity to thrive, free from fear and supported by tangible, economic, and social resources. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it is time now to suspend our proceedings for our morning break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.30 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

### Pinktober Initiative

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament; before I go into my statement, I would like to respond to honourable Virendra Lal's comments. As usual, I do not think he was listening.

The Ministry of Agriculture was at each of these locations providing training, tools, awareness, markets and food processing training, and these are not one off. These communities are connected to SMEs and markets through Women's Expo, which we have spoken about in this House before.

I invite honourable Lal to take his time to read our recently launched National Action Plan on Women's Economic Empowerment to understand the roadmap. You had asked, are women linked to economic empowerment opportunities?

This Government has just launched a plan. Please, read it. It will tell you the roadmap, the budgets, the resources or women's access to product development and market. You are questioning, and I am providing you with an answer. You said you are ready to scrutinize our plans and budgets, you are welcome to do so. Visit our office, and we are happy to send you these plans.

(Laughter)

HON. S. KIRAN.- He also questioned on what we are doing on gender-based violence? Again, I invite him to read the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, which is right now in its midterm review, to evaluate its success so that he can get his answers, and I invite him to participate in this review also.

This Government is not doing these things one off. It is very obvious, if you see the number of Government agents present at each of these events. We are making an effort to make sure our rural communities have access to services and are in touch with the Government.

This is not one off. As I have said, REACH programmes are already planned for the Western Division as well as the Central Division. So, if you have questions, we are happy to provide you with answers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji commemorated Pinktober 2025, our Breast Cancer Awareness Month - a campaign held in October, to raise awareness for breast cancer with the goals of promoting early detection, screening and supporting those affected. The month is symbolized by the pink ribbon to educate the public about risk factors, signs and symptoms, as well as supporting survivors and honouring those who lost their lives to the disease.

Pinktober is not merely an awareness campaign, it is a national call to action - a reminder that fight against cancer is a fight for life, for equality and for dignity. It is about ensuring that every Fijian woman and man, whether in the city or the most remote village, has access to knowledge screening and support needed to prevent and survive this disease.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pinktober has come to an end, but breast cancer awareness must not fade when the pink ribbons come down. This is a conversation that must continue every single day in our homes, in our communities, in our workplaces, and in our schools because cancer does not keep a

calendar, it does not wait for October, and neither should our vigilance, our awareness, or our compassion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, cancer remains among the leading causes of premature death among Fijian women, particularly breast and cervical cancer. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among our women. Fiji also faces one of the highest cervical cancer rates in The Pacific. Tobacco cancer is the second most common cancer among women and one of the most preventable through HPV vaccination and early screening.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services data reveals that between 2013 and 2022, a total of 2,517 Fijian women were diagnosed with breast cancer. In 2022 alone, there were about 355 new cases, of which 98 percent were women and 2 percent were men. The youngest recorded patient was just 17 years old, a sobering reminder that breast cancer does not discriminate by age or gender.

The Fiji Cancer Society continues to register 10 to 15 newly diagnosed breast cancer patients each month in the Central Division alone. That is why we must act because early detection saves lives, and no one should have to face this battle alone. However, early detection is only possible when women are empowered with knowledge and have access to screening, treatment and counselling, and this Government is ensuring exactly that.

Through the Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2023 and the Fiji Reproductive Health Policy 2014, cancer prevention is now rightly recognised not only as a health priority, but as a gender and social protection imperative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, this Government continues to roll out the HPV vaccination programme for girls aged 9 to 12 years old, providing protection against cervical cancer. However, we know there is more to do. While HPV1 coverage averages around 100 percent nationally, HPV2 coverage remains low at around 55 percent to 57 percent.

The Government is determined to close this gap through stronger school health coordination and outreach to parents and guardians. Screening for both, breast and cervical cancer, also remain below desired levels. That is why we are intensifying public awareness, promoting breast self-examination, and expanding mobile outreach clinics to bring services closer to women in rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection partnered with Ministry of Health and Medical Services to take awareness programmes directly to rural communities throughout the month of October, as part of our divisional commemorations.

In the Central Division, more than 100 women gathered at Dada Government Station in Namosi, and went through, not only screening, but also the information on Sexual Transmitted Infection, (STI) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

In the Eastern Division, awareness events were held in Vanuabalavu, Gau and Kadavu. In Gau, we heard a story of a survivor, who had knowledge about symptoms, she had heard about it, so she knew when she found lumps, it was something abnormal. She spoke with her family about it, and because she found it early, with her family support, she was able to come to Suva and get treated on time and has been a survivor for the past decade. This shows the importance of knowledge even in the most remote areas.

In the Northern Division, rural women from 20 villages in Bua went through interactive health discussions and screenings. In the Western Division in Rakiraki and Tavua, there awareness events and screening. These engagements gave women the opportunity to access breast cancer information, screening, referrals, counselling services and bridging the urban rural divide in healthcare. Our partners in this fight deserve recognition, Mr. speaker.

The Fiji Cancer Society has been at the forefront of community outreach and survivor support. In October alone, the Fiji Cancer Society conducted 49 awareness sessions with many partners.

A new initiative with the Ministry of Health, the Kirby Institute and the Fiji Cancer Society has launched the HPV self-swabbing screening programme in the North, where over 2,200 women have already been screened at the Labasa Health Office, Savusavu Hospital and Taveuni Hospital. This partnership is a powerful demonstration of how collaboration delivers impact, reaching women who would otherwise go unseen, unheard and untreated.

I would like to acknowledge the corporate sector, universities and the many workplaces that organise awareness during the month. Our fight against cancer is strengthened through the many partnerships, including Medical Services Pacific, House of Sarah, Soqosoqo vakamarama ni i-Taukei, Soroptimist International, and many other community and faith-based organisations that have been conducting outreach into our villages and settlements.

We also acknowledge our development partners - United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Women (UN Women) and the Governments of Australia and New Zealand for their continued support for women's health, gender equality and cancer prevention initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have now come into a new month, which is known as Movember, which is dedicated to men's awareness of prostate cancer and men's mental health. Prostate cancer is a significant health concern for men in Fiji, marked by a poor public understanding of the disease, which leads to late-stage diagnosis and lower survival rates. In recent years, there have been approximately 30 to 50 new cases reported annually.

I urge the leaders in this House to openly talk about cancers and encourage our men and women to get screened. Your involvement can help promote healthy behaviours and address the high mortality rate caused by late cancer detection.

I also call on our community and faith leaders to surround the families affected by this disease with love and compassion, to ensure that no one has to walk this journey alone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity to share, and I hope that this House will continue with earnest screening for men during this month. *Vinaka*.

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

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection for the Ministerial Statement. Cancer awareness is crucial because it leads to early detection, informed decision-making and saves lives. It empowers individuals and communities to recognise risk, seek timely care and support those affected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, breast cancer ranks among the top five cancers recorded by Fiji Cancer Society. From 2021 to 2024, Fiji recorded 1,731 cancer patients, with 18 new cases in January 2025 alone. While this figure includes all cancer types, breast cancer remains a significant portion of these

cases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, funding is the biggest challenge in the fight against cancer. The fight against cancer in Fiji depends heavily on grants, donations and fundraising to support awareness, screenings and treatment. There is growing need for early detection and improved access to treatment, especially in rural remote areas where health infrastructure is limited. The Government should look into improving health infrastructure in rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, creating cancer awareness among all Fijians, including school students, is vital to promote early detection, healthy habits and empathy towards affected individuals. It empowers them with knowledge and reduces stigma. Awareness should be well planned and carried out in all locations, including rural, remote and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, schools are ideal platforms for consistent and structured awareness campaigns. It is very important to create awareness among students for many good reasons.

Firstly, it promotes early detection and prevention. Teaching students about common signs and symptoms of cancer helps them recognise potential health issues early, either in themselves or their loved ones. Awareness encourages healthy lifestyle choices, like avoiding tobacco, eating nutritious food and staying physically active, which are key to cancer prevention.

Secondly, it reduces stigma and misinformation. Many students may have misconceptions about cancer being contagious or always fatal. Awareness programmes correct these myths. It fosters a supportive environment for classmates who may be undergoing treatment or have family members affected by cancer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it encourages students to understand what cancer patients go through. They are more likely to show empathy and support rather than fear or exclusion. This is especially important if a peer or teacher is diagnosed with cancer, helping the school community respond with kindness and understanding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fighting cancer involves a combination of prevention, early detection, lifestyle changes and medical treatment. While there is no guaranteed way to eliminate cancer risk, we may significantly reduce it and improve outcomes through proactive steps.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, cancer is the third most common cause of death in Fiji. Rural and low-income communities face barriers to early detection and treatment. Funding is the biggest challenge in the fight against cancer in Fiji. I urge the Government and the honourable Minister for Finance to provide more funding to support awareness, screenings and treatment of cancer. Fiji lacks cancer specialists and screening machines and equipment. I urge the Government to address the shortage of equipment and address the issue urgently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fighting cancer is everyone's responsibility because it affects all of us directly or indirectly, and collective action is important to reduce its global impact, whether through awareness, support, funding, every individual and institution has a role to play. Thank you.

#### State and Future of the Fiji Sheep Industry

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and fellow Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and viewers tuning in on today's live broadcast; *ni sa bula vinaka*. It is, indeed, a privilege to deliver a statement on a matter of great national significance - the state and the future of

Fiji's sheep industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture continues to be a fundamental component of Fiji's economy, and within this sector, the sheep industry exemplifies how the integration of science, policy and grassroot dedication can collectively enhance livelihood and strengthen our rural economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the early 1990s, Fiji had around 8,000 sheep. However, numbers declined significantly due to higher mortality rates caused by wild dogs and pig attacks, internal parasite infections, poor quality pasture and unsustainable management systems. By 1950s, the sheep population was less than 50. In the same year, there was a strong recommendation that the sheep industry should be revived. That is when our current sheep industry was conceived.

About 30 years later, the Fiji Mutton Sheep Project was initiated primarily to develop a tropical breed well suited to local climatic conditions. The project was made possible with the support of the assistance of the Australian Government, and I wish to thank the Australian Government for its never-ending support to Fiji's agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, different breeds of sheeps were imported. A flock of Barbados Black Belly breeding rams was imported from the US in the 1980s. This is a hair sheep, and this was followed by the introduction of Polled Dorsets, Coriedales, Perendales and Wiltshire Horns breeding ewes from Australia and New Zealand. These were woolly breeds.

The Barbados Black Belly sheep and other breeds were placed into a 10-year high security quarantine in the island of Makogai, thus making the first ever sheep breeding research in Fiji. This breeding programme was to develop an easy-care sheep breed that did not require shearing and had a higher reproductive rate to exhibit good growth and had reasonable tolerance to internal parasites and food rot. The result was the successful breeding of the first ever local breed of sheep called the Fiji Fantastic. The Fiji Fantastic is a hairy breed, very fertile and exhibits all characteristics that were required.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 1991, the Ministry distributed the first locally bred sheep to private farms. Today, the sheep has successfully adapted across the Fiji Islands, a powerful testament of the resilience of the breed.

I wish to thank all our nation's pioneering sheep breeders and hard-working researchers and breeders for the very successful breeding programme. I thank Dr. Tabunakawai, Dr. Cokanasiga, Mr. Manueli, Mr. Maikali Drauna, and many more, who worked tirelessly in this project.

I was so fortunate to be the last Station Manager in the main Makogai Breeding Station and also conducted a few of the last research that were required before the stocks were ready to be released to Multiplication Stations and later to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the basic rationale for the development of the local sheep industry has remained unchanged since the 1950s. This is for import substitution, food security and to provide a means of utilising the large areas of grassland in the country. The sustained growth of the local sheep industry and the increasing number of farmers who wish to take up the sheep industry reflect its suitability for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, local sheep breeds have adapted effectively to private farm environments, primarily because they graze rather than browse. Unlike goats, which tend to browse and can damage surrounding vegetation, sheep are better suited for integration into cropping systems, like

coconuts, cocoa, *dalo* and sugarcane. They supplement labour for weed control and also provide sheep manure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture initiated the importation of 74 Dorper sheep and three Australian white rams to strengthen and refine the genetic quality of local breeds, and I wish to thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his support in this project. He was then the Minister for Agriculture.

Although the overall results fell short of expectations, the first generation crossed between local and imported sheep demonstrated outstanding performances in growth and average weight gain. These improved breeds have since been distributed to our local farmers. We were confident then that our Fiji Fantastic Breed can and will only be improved through the introduction of new Barbados Black Belly bloodlines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently, the number of private sheep farms has grown from 503 in 2014 to 1,280 in 2025, reflecting strong farmers' confidence and investor interest. Furthermore, our national flock has more than doubled from 18,603 in 2014 to 41,895 in 2025 - reflecting the success of improved breeding and health management programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the growth of the industry is strong in the Western and Northern Divisions, creating jobs, strengthening rural livelihoods, and contributing meaningfully to Fiji's food security and economic development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are no anticipated issues with the local marketing of Fiji sheep. The current farm gate price, ranging from \$10.00 to \$12.00 per kilogramme live weight, reflect strong demand for locally produced sheep. The rise in prices indicates that the demand exceeds the supply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regard to foreign earnings, there is significant potential in the local sheep industry, particularly if export opportunities to other small Pacific Island Countries are pursued. Fiji had exported Fiji Fantastic to both, Samoa and Tonga.

To unlock this potential, it is essential to collaborate with international and regional partners on adaptive research and technology transfer, while simultaneously scaling up local production to reduce reliance on imported sheep meat.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Research and Development of our Government Stations, including Nawaicoba, Seaqaqa, Batiri, and Mua, have a total of 1,900 animals. Breeders are carefully selected based on their breeding lines, breeding performance records, and to ensure the continuous improvement of the genetic base of Fiji's national flock.

Government stations facilitate:

- improvement of the Fiji sheep breed;
- carry out applied research to address current situations;
- develop linkages with international research; and
- technology transfer to farmers through awareness, training, demonstration plots, pilot farms and hands-on experiences.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture & Waterways supports the sheep industry by providing development packages to farmers, aimed at improving productivity, enhancing food security, boosting local production, and reducing reliance on imports. These development packages and assistance include:

- (1) infrastructure improvement;
- (2) controlling wild dogs;
- (3) nutritional improvement;
- (4) breed and bloodline improvement;
- (5) equipment and tools to improve husbandry practices; and
- (6) capacity building for farmers and staff.

Ninety percent of our local farmers are smallholder producers, hence in 2023, Fiji produced 149 tonnes of sheep locally, compared to 8,067 tons of sheep meat imported.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of today, a total of 547 successful recipients have received various packages valued at FJ\$1.7 million, and for this financial year, the production target is to increase by 4.42 tonnes of local sheep meat through the support provided to sheep farmers.

Trying to reduce import is a challenging task for Fiji since all our livestock are grazing on marginal lands. When prime agriculture lands are developed for non-agriculture uses, grazing will have to be moved to poor fertile areas in the mountains.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with the Government's efforts to lower our over-reliance on imported sheep meat, a total of \$635,000 has been allocated to the Sheep Research and Extension initiative. This project focuses on breed improvement, nutrition enhancement, and losses from disease and dog attacks on sheep. Our goal is clear - increase local production, improve the quality of meat, and maintain consistency to the markets.

Finally, Mr. Speaker Sir, I wish to thank you and the honourable Prime Minister for including me in your recent trip to Barbados. Barbados is the home for the fathers of our Fiji Fantastic. That trip was a blessing.

On one of our side events, together with the former Assistant Minister for Agriculture, honourable Viam Pillay, we paid a visit to the Barbados Ministry of Agriculture and had a very, very successful meeting with them. We will continue our communication with the authorities in Barbados, and that will be our direction, Sir. They are looking forward to our close collaboration on the development of our sheep industry. This Government remains steadfast in its commitment to expanding the sheep industry, advancing agricultural self-sufficiency, and building a resilient and prosperous rural economy. Thank you.

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

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was expecting the honourable Minister to share more of the Barbados trip, particularly on the cruise ship. I think he let the delegation down when he did not stand up when he was challenged by the local Barbados women.

(Laughter)

On a serious note, honourable Minister, thank you for the statement this morning, but I also hope that probably later, if you can also provide a Ministerial Statement on pests. I know that it is, indeed in the media now about fruit-fly seen in the Yasawas. In one of my recent visits in Nacocolevu, they also talked about the armyworms. This is of concern and probably, a Ministerial Statement will be good, just to clear the House and, of course, we can also help in advocating to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has, again, highlighted the significant potential in the sheep industry, but yet to be fully realised. I would urge Government to give the honourable Minister the full support that he needs. He has talked about the benefits, how it impacts the lives of our farmers and, of course, in terms of food and nutrition security, and the economic benefits when we want to broaden the economic base and diversify our economy. We look at the importation figures, which is high, and there is potential for us to reduce imports and opportunities as well for us to export to the Small Island Developing States within the region and, perhaps, to other bigger partners as well.

The honourable Minister needs the full support because he very well understands our frustration when we started with this a few years back. He has talked about bringing in the other breeds for crossbreeding purposes. This is merely complimentary, particularly with the different features, and because the Fiji Fantastic has been there since 1991, but we need to go the next level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because of the very limited time, I will not repeat what the honourable Minister has stated. As I have said, he needs the support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few suggestions to help the Minister. He is ensuring that we have the right breed, and that is very, very important for all these programmes. Whether he does pure breeding, crossbreeding, line breeding or inbreeding, we need to have the right breed and, of course, we already have the base, which is the Fiji Fantastic.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, management and nutrition is a big component, and with that comes money. He needs to be well supported on this when it comes to breeding, even if we want to go the next level, flushing is important, where the animals are given special diets three weeks prior to the breeding so that, that will improve their ovulation, but that comes with a cost.

Nutrition needs is very, very important. The health of the ram is very important. For that he needs proper facilities and that needs funding and, of course, sanitation.

Thirdly, a consideration again for us to go into commercial breeding or accelerated breeding. We have started with this, and the honourable Minister knows the frustrations in the programme. One of the main frustrations is just the allocation of contracts, and that is why we need a whole of government approach when it comes to assisting the honourable Minister. By the time the contract is given or renewed, it is already five months into the new year. They work in seasons because of the oestrous cycle, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is why he needs all this support.

We need the use of technology. He is well aware, and he is the right man to take this forward, given his experience and expertise, but he needs that support. We need some commercial players. He has talked about the 90 percent of the current farmers who are smallholder farmers and for us to go the next level, we need some big players, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On funding, I, again, do not need to say more on this, but if the honourable Minister is given the appropriate funding, the Ministry can do better, and he needs additional funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I have talked about the support of the various agencies. It is good that now, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) is under the Minister because previously when we wanted to bring this new breed from Victoria, BAF did not allow us just to take the shortcut into New South Wales, so we have to take the animals all the way and have Air New Zealand fly them across to us, and then the frustrations here about the contracts, et cetera.

The honourable Minister needs a lot of support, and we wish the honourable Minister all the best to take this forward because there is huge potential in the industry but with some of those suggestions, hopefully, this will come to reality and all the best to the honourable Minister on this, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER. - I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his statement. I am not going to reveal anything on how the Minister's engagements as part of our delegation to Barbados, except to say or confirm that he honourable Viam Pillay took the opportunity to call on his counterpart from the Barbados Government. However, one thing I know, I now fully understand the history of our Fiji Fantastic. Thank you.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### Government Strategies to Improve Productivity (Question No. 230/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament on the strategies that the Government has implemented to improve overall productivity in the public sector?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Improving productivity in the public sector is essential, not only for delivering high-quality services efficiently to our citizens, but also for supporting sustainable economic growth. The Government has implemented various strategic initiatives and reforms aimed at modernising public sector operations, building capacity and fostering result-orientated culture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) is undergoing a major transformation through its Vision 2030, which aims to enhance productivity, social progress and environmental sustainability across the region. Under Fiji's chairmanship from 2023 to 2024, the APO's collaboration has been significantly strengthened, and Fiji has played a leading role in shaping and advancing the Vision 2030 Framework.

During the 66th Meeting in Seoul last week, the Vision was adopted and Fiji presented its strategic partnership programme, focussing on green productivity and enhancing public sector productivity through knowledge sharing and policy support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's leadership was instrumental in guiding members towards a need-based and member-led approach, aligned with national development goals and Vision 2030 principles of innovation, inclusiveness and sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has undertaken significant groundwork towards the establishment of the National Productivity Commission of Fiji, a landmark initiative to embed productivity enhancement at the core of national development.

In alignment with global best practices, the Ministry conducted benchmarking studies with the APO in Tokyo, as well as with the Productivity Commission of Australia, Jobs and Skills Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These engagements provided valuable insights into proven productivity models and institutional frameworks, which will guide the establishment of the

Commission suited to Fiji's socio-economic context.

These findings highlighted the need for a national productivity body that will provide independent research-based policy advice to the Government, conduct public inquiry on key economic and social issues, promote productivity efficiency and fairness, and support policies that improve the wellbeing of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji hosted the 65th Heads of National Productivity Organizations in Nadi from 23rd to 25th October, 2024, where the APO launched its flagship sustainability platform - Green Productivity 2.0 (GP 2.0), that integrates productivity and environmental sustainability. The launch of the GP 2.0 in Fiji was highly symbolic and meaningful as it underscored the importance of sustainable productivity, even Fiji's exposure as an island nation facing climate and economic pressures.

At this meeting my Permanent Secretary, as the APO Director for Fiji, accepted an invitation to join the Green Productivity Advisory Council. This gives Fiji a direct role in shaping the GP 2.0 Agenda, supporting the design and oversight of this initiative in the Asian Pacific region, together with senior officials from Japan, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand.

Following an inaugural meeting in Osaka in April, discussions with the fellow council member, Professor Yasui Matsumoto, the Science and Technology Advisor for the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, have been ongoing to introduce technologies and training suited to Fiji's needs in waste management and in the agriculture sector. These improvements in agriculture can be aligned with green outcomes for more efficient practices, reduce environmental impact and better livelihoods for our farmers, and signals Fiji's commitment to applying the GP principles, which is productivity and environment, in key domestic sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is also advancing reforms to improve the ease of doing business in Fiji. My Ministry, together with the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications has launched an innovative digital platform called businessNOW FIJI. This platform simplifies business processes, attracts investments and drives Fiji's economic growth.

Following Fiji's ranking of 102nd in the World Bank's 2020 Doing Business Report, the Government took proactive measures to improve business processes in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 26th September 2024, businessNOW FIJI launched its first phase of integrated e-services, promoting ease of doing business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a training of enhancing public sector productivity was conducted from 2nd December to 5th December, 2024, here in Suva. This national level training involved 42 participants from 20 Ministries and State-Owned Enterprises, who strengthened their understanding of key productivity concepts, such as productivity measurement, public-private partnerships, citizen-centred service delivery, regulatory practices and practical productivity improvement tools. These initiatives have built the capacity of senior officials or productivity focal points across Government to drive transformation and efficiency in their respective agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore the Ministry has initiated work to appoint productivity champions in each of these Government Ministries. These champions will serve as focal points for promoting continuous productivity improvement, fostering innovation and facilitating the implementation of productivity tools across the public sector.

The Labour Management Consultation and Cooperation Committees established under the Employment Relations Act as a mechanism to drive productivity at the workplace level is also being strengthened.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government has embarked on a transformative initiative, with the establishment of the Fiji Learning Institute for the Public Service (FLIPS), a dedicated national institution operated by the Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Civil Service. It aims at strengthening capacity development and leadership, and productivity within the public sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government recognises that human capital is the foundation of productivity, and that the modernisation of the Public Service depends on continuous learning and professional excellence. The FLIPS aims at strengthening workforce competencies, promoting innovation and productivity, financing ethical government accountability and a continuous culture for improvement to drive digital transformation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am appreciative of the fact that I have been asked to answer this question today. With all being highlighted, I would like to put on record that the previous administration implemented strategies and made decisions which served only to demoralise and weaken the public sector. The Coalition Government is now diligently rebuilding confidence, trust and morale within the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government recognises that the strength of any nation lies in the dedication and productivity of its servants. That is why we have taken decisive steps to uplift the welfare of our workers through pay increases, the regularisation of contractual arrangements, increase in retirement age and ongoing review of the employment terms and conditions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no longer the fear of losing their job at a month's notice. They have security of tenure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in two years, we have given civil servants a pay rise of between 10 percent and 23 percent, unprecedented without a job evaluation exercise. The only time more than what we have given was given was when there were job evaluation exercises. Never. otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2017, there was a job evaluation exercise implemented and civil servants were forced to sign contracts. If they did not sign a contract, they were not given that increase.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when our public servants feel valued, respected and fairly treated, they perform at their best. And when they perform at their best, the entire machinery of Government operates more efficiently, delivering improved services and outcomes for the public and the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these initiatives are part of the Coalition Government's broader agenda, underpinned by the review of the Employment Relations Act. This review is a reaffirmation of our commitment to fairness, equity and mutual respect at the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building the morale of our workers and restoring dignity in the public service, this Government is laying the foundation for a stronger, more efficient and more responsive Civil Service, one that truly serves the people with pride and purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when a young person gains a skill that opens doors to opportunity, that is productivity. When a woman finds a decent job that allows her to provide for her family, that is productivity. When a business innovates and creates jobs, that is productivity. When a government creates policies that enables all of these to happen, that is productivity. It is everyone's responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I accept supplementary questions, I would like to remind members on this. When a Member is answering a question that is posed to him or her, give him the courtesy he is entitled to. You will have the opportunity to query and ask further supplementary questions like now when the opportunity is there.

Do not, and I will not accept running commentaries when he or she is delivering the statement which was asked of him or her that you are commenting on the side. So, give him or her the courtesy. That is my advice to you Members. Now, we will go back to the supplementary questions.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question was rather simple, but the honourable Minister took us all around the world where he visited and what he did, rather than focussing on the country itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister mentioned that the salaries and contracts and everything else was increased. My question to him is whether he has taken any survey, as Minister responsible for productivity, to gauge whether the salary increases, the contracts, et cetera, has resulted in any increase in productivity? Also, customer satisfaction from the public, are they satisfied with the services provided by the public sector?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for that question. I had just alluded to all the steps that we have taken to first make sure that the morale of the civil servants is restored. I always say that a happy worker is a productive worker. A worker who has a precarious contract who does not even know whether he will have a job next day cannot be expected to be productive. So, we have put all that in place.

We are now we working with all the Ministries, together with the Ministry of Civil Service, to see that we are able to enhance productivity through all the steps that we are taking - the advanced training that we are providing, the leadership that we are providing, the various champions of productivity that we are now appointing in the respective Ministries, all these are going to improve and then we are going to do our survey. They never did any survey, and they are talking about survey.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, while listening to his response, I initially thought it is a non-functional productivity unit at the Ministry that prepared the response for the honourable Minister but towards the end, when the honourable Minister mentioned the previous administration, I just thought that it is NFP's answer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has explained about businessNOW FIJI, et cetera, that is related to the private sector, not the public sector, and was started by the previous administration. I believe this particular Unit in the Ministry has not conducted a single training in any Ministry. My question is, how does the honourable Minister explain to Parliament how we can improve the productivity of the Civil Service without even conducting a single training to any of the Ministries? While they do not conduct certain trainings to the private sector, they do this to other Ministries. So, how can productivity be increased?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe the honourable Member was not really listening while I was speaking. I very clearly said that the former Government Training Centre has been revamped and is conducting all those training programmes. I just alluded to the fact that 42 senior civil servants have gone through that training and others are also going through those kind of trainings that are continuing, through the Ministry of Civil Service and the Public Service Commission. That was something I had alluded to and that is how we are approaching this.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his attempt at answering the question. It is rather convoluted and did not get down to what was asked. The question was, what has the Government done to implement and improve overall productivity?

When you use these words “implemented to improve”, improve means, you have measured what it was before, you took these actions, and you measure the results. He is telling us, “We are doing all of these things”, but he has not even defined what the baseline was. This is what the word “improve” means - you make a comparison.

My question is, how can you manage productivity if you have not captured the level of productivity in the public sector? Then you look at all of your activities to see whether it has an impact on productivity. Have those things been done? Whether you are talking about total factor productivity or capital productivity or innovation productivity, has the baselines been done? If not, all of these will be just a lot of actions being done, but you do not know whether it is leading to any productive change. How can you measure? How can you do that? Unless you do the measurements, and you know what to measure.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have already asked your question. You are spending too much on it.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to answer honourable Usamate's question in short, we have taken the baseline from where they left. They left a totally demoralised Civil Service, we are uplifting it now, and that is productivity.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.-Honourable Minister, health and productivity are very much related. A healthy workforce is a productive workforce. We are really concerned about the health status particularly in some of our young civil service, many are dying too early. What is the Government doing to address this issue, honourable Minister?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we should start from this Parliament, in terms of the good habits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are continuing with the Wednesday wellness days in the Civil Service. Civil servants are given an hour earlier break. There is a new gym for them, and we encourage all our civil servants and the entire nation to get into healthy habits. We need to see that we eat nutritious food. I must admit that the morning tea that we get in Parliament is not all that healthy, Sir, so we definitely need to improve on that - what we eat and what we produce in our backyards. We encourage our people to plant their own *bele* and do their exercise everyday. I am happy to share that I hardly ever miss my 5 kilometre to 7-kilometre walks.

MR. SPEAKER.- Let me say this, honourable Minister, we have a secret plan which the Prime Minister does not know, for a gym for this premises. Thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That is good news, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in order to galvanise the efforts of all the stakeholders that you have actually spoken about and your ambitions, have you set an aspirational target with respect to percentage in terms of productivity growth? Have you set a target that we should aspire to in terms of percentage?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, honourable Usamate spoke about business excellence awards, that is a very good measurement tool for productivity. He and I worked together when we were involved with the National Training and Productivity Centre back in those days to

actually conduct Business Excellence Awards. I thank him for bringing that up, and we intend to take that up with the Public Service Commission and see that the Ministry of Civil Service gets all the Ministries to participate in the excellence awards.

Pacific Islands Transformation Project  
(Question No. 231/2025)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises, Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises inform Parliament on the Pacific Islands Transformation Project and how it can accelerate trade in the Pacific?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. At the outset, I would like to clarify that the Pacific Healthy Islands Transformation Project and Accelerating Trade Facilitation and Logistics in the Pacific are two separate initiatives. While both are supported through loan and grant financing from the World Bank's International Development, they each serve distinct purposes in advancing our region's development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister responsible for external trade now, I will speak specifically on accelerating trade facilitation and logistics in the Pacific project. While the honourable Member may wish to direct any further questions regarding the Pacific Healthy Islands Transformation Project to the honourable Minister for Health, under whose portfolio that project falls.

The Accelerating Trade Facilitation and Logistics in the Pacific Project is a regional initiative involving six Pacific Island countries - Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Kiribati. Its purpose is clear, that is, to reduce the time and cost of trade across the Pacific by modernising customs operations, improving logistics and enhancing regional cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pacific Island countries face unique challenges - small population, spread over vast ocean distances, high transport costs and limited connectivity. Trade is central to our economic development, but moving goods across borders remains slow and expensive.

In some of our neighbouring countries, only one or two shipping lines serve a port. When a vessel is delayed or cancelled, the whole supply chain of critical goods are affected - food, fuel, and medicine can be disrupted for weeks. These realities drive up the cost of living, constrain businesses and limit trade opportunities. This project seeks to change that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the project focusses on three core areas:

- (1) It aims to modernise customs and border procedures by moving towards electronic processing, risk-based systems and coordinated inspections. These improvements are expected to significantly reduce delays, minimise paperwork and create a more efficient environment for traders and border agencies.
- (2) The project also seeks to improve digital and physical connectivity across the region. That includes supporting better trade infrastructure, logistics systems and port operations so that goods can move more efficiently and reliably across borders. Enhanced connectivity will also help countries address long-standing supply chain bottlenecks and lower transport costs.

- (3) In addition to this, the project also focusses on strengthening regional cooperation by harmonising trade procedures, improving information sharing and developing shared digital platforms to facilitate trade throughout the Pacific. This collaborative approach will help create a more integrated regional trading system that benefits all participating countries.

Trade today depends heavily on speed, transparency and access to information – and digitalisation is the key to achieving all three. For Fiji, this means upgrading our core customs management system to its latest version. Through this project, (ASYCUDA) Fiji will migrate to a modern, regionally harmonised system that enables data exchange and interoperability with our regional partners. This will reduce delays at the border, cut down paperwork and give traders real-time access to clearance information.

Beyond Customs, trade facilitation requires strong coordination among all agencies involved in border control - such as Customs, Biosecurity and Health standards. The project will support the design and implementation of a National Single Window System which links all these agencies through a single online portal. Instead of having to visit multiple offices or submit the same documents repeatedly, traders will be able to submit all the information, clearances and payments electronically in one place. This system will greatly reduce redundancy, improve transparency and make trade faster and more predictable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another critical aspect of the project is the provision of modern customs and border equipment. These includes:

- non-intrusive inspection scanners;
- weighing equipment and container hygiene, and
- laboratory testing facilities.

Such tools will allow customs officers to conduct risk-based inspections, focusing on high-risk cargo while speeding up the clearance of compliant goods. This will not only reduce clearance times but also improve compliance with international trade and health standards. While the primary focus will be on our main international ports, equipment may also be deployed to secondary ports where necessary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the progress on the project will be carefully measured through international benchmarks such as the World Bank's Business Ready (B-READY) Report and the Time Release Study (TRS) developed by the World Customs Organisation, which tracks the actual time taken for customs and border clearance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by reducing delays in our ports and simplifying compliance processes, the project will make it easier, faster, and cheaper to trade, boosting economic efficiency and competitiveness. This is a forward-looking investment in Fiji's economic future and a cornerstone for deeper regional integration and sustainable growth across the Pacific.

I wish to acknowledge and highlight that the implementation agency for this project, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) and any further queries on the operational aspects of this project can be directed to FRCS or the aligned Minister, the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning and National Development which are mine and statistics.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Prime Minister for a very detailed response which made sense, and I am sure that such a project will definitely help our country. I request the honourable Prime Minister that he needs to talk to his Ministers so that they can respond to the questions exactly like you did, Sir, it makes sense. My question to the honourable

Prime Minister is the duration of the project. I know that the project is run by the World Bank. What is the duration of the project, and is there a cost associated with Fiji?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the development of the system will depend on how well our own authorities and agencies here work with the other international agencies that are working together in this development. It is an international programme, and I credit the beginning of the work to my predecessors in this portfolio.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a huge aspect of this regional trade is the shipping aspect. We have had huge problems with shipping regionally. Is that another portion of the agreement that is going to be looked at? In terms of the Melanesian Trade Agreement, all the kind of stuff that exists, one of the most recognisable things was the shipping aspect of it. Is that part of the process that also needs to be looked at so we can ship to our neighbours as quickly as possible?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes. The foreign trade and external trade aspect will come in, and the finance and the actual customs handling will also be handled by the Ministry of Finance as the core function of that Ministry in that aspect of trade and financing. So, yes, it will be a multi-ministerial effort and an international effort also.

Monitoring of Higher Education Institutions  
(Question No. 232/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament how the Higher Education Commission of Fiji monitors higher education institutions, to ensure that the required teaching hours for all the courses are fulfilled as prescribed in the course description?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The Higher Education Commission, as part of its current operation monitors higher education institutions on the specific functions as highlighted in the Higher Education Commission Act. They play a regulatory function.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in relation to the question, the detailed monitoring of teaching hours for every educator and every course offered across all higher education institutions falls within the internal academic policy of the institution, and it is externally monitored by the Commission. To attempt such an exercise would require the Higher Education Commission to verify the individual working hours of all academic staff and reconcile governance, institutional time sheets and records. This would not only be a highly resource-intensive exercise, a cumbersome process, but it would also present significant reliability challenges. It would, in fact, place the Commission in a position where it must depend on institutional records. It could be inconsistent or unreliable. This would be a situation that is neither practical nor desirable as a regulator.

The Commission's role, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to uphold and monitor quality assurance standards at a systematic level. This includes ensuring that approved programmes are delivered in accordance with accredited curriculum standards and institutions, employ qualified staff, and that effective internal monitoring mechanisms are in place to ensure compliance with their own academic requirements, including teaching hours. Should there be any report or verified breaches of these obligations that are reported or brought to our attention, the Higher Education Commission has the authority to investigate and take appropriate action under its regulatory framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the responsibility of ensuring that the prescribed teaching hours are met lies primarily with the institution themselves, under the oversight of their internal quality assurance and governance systems and the governance structures.

HON. H. CHAND.- I would like to thank the honourable Minister for a good response to the question. What happens if an institution fails to meet the Higher Education Commission Fiji's standards?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Member did not hear what I just stated. Should there be any report or verified breaches of these obligations reported or brought to our attention, the Higher Education Commission has the authority to investigate and take appropriate action under its regulatory framework.

Return of Native Land to Rightful Owners  
(Question No. 233/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Native Grant 2 (NG2) piece of land in Nadarivatu that will finally return to its rightful owners - Mataqali Nadala, Yavusa Nubu?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, by way of background, in June 1905, the Nadala land, which is now known as NG2 or Native Grant 2 consisted of a total area of 15,000 acres or 6,070 hectares. It was acquired by the Colonial Government from Mataqali Nadala under the provision of the land ordinance at that time and had a quick rental of £25. Interestingly, I was just flipping through an AI programme just to find out how much that money is today. The £25 in 1905 equated to £3,800 of today, which is approximately FJ\$11,000 just to give it some context.

The government acquired NG2 by the then Governor, and the reason that was provided for the acquisition was that it was going to be one of Fiji's sanatoriums. Now, that word gives us a meaning of a space where people are going to be treated, people who are terminally ill or have some form of sickness. And around 1905, I think it was just at the backdrop of the great measles in Fiji and its recovery, quite possibly some other diseases that were around at the time. So, this 15,000 acres was particularly acquired as a sanatorium for the colony, but it also included a forestry area, as well as a recreational reserve.

Again, on the footnote of this acquisition, there was a desire by the then Colonial Government to set up an industry for the colony. The land that was identified, which is the 15,000 acres, was also proposed at the time to be the place where the Indian immigrants came in to work in the cane farms, who are not particularly happy, but have experience in working or planting cocoa and coffee where they came from. So, it was also a set up to become a place where a new industry for cocoa and coffee was going to start from.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now in 2025. Obviously, we have the great measles behind us and all the diseases that may have existed in those times. In 2002, there was a decision that was reached by the then Cabinet of the government of Fiji and with meetings and various consultations with the landowners and stakeholders, they agreed that balance of NG2 (15,000 acres), we are going to take away parts of these 15,000 acres that is being utilized by Government stations, agriculture stations, forestry stations. The balance, which was first acquired as a sanatorium place, no longer used for it, was going to be reserved for the original landowners, which, of course, does not really fit into the picture of when land acquired for public purposes is no longer required for the purpose for which it

was initially acquired, needs to be reverted to the landowners.

In this instance, it was the decision of the Cabinet to reserve it. They could use it, but it will remain as State land. The subject land has now been fully surveyed, and it is incorporated into Development Plan 11913, and this survey was completed in 2022. The understanding when we took the paper to Cabinet this year, was that the public purpose no longer existed and when public purpose no longer exists, it is only right that the Government would return it to the landowners. That has been done, and I, as the Minister for Lands, have exercised my powers under section 8 of the State Lands Act, I have introduced the paper into Cabinet and upon Cabinet's approval, we are working on the paperwork - the declaration, as well as the notice that will go in the Gazette with the Office of the Solicitor-General.

I have also met with the landowning unit from Nadala, and we are planning to have the day in which this is going to be celebrated with them, before Christmas of this year. On that note, there is a side issue that we are also trying to massage and make sure that it is resolved with an adjoining landowning unit over this piece of land.

I am sure with the help of the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission (Veitarogi Vanua), we will be able to overcome that. We are working with iTLTB and as I said, we have given assurance to the landowners of Nadala that before Christmas this year we will finalise all the paperwork that is needed, and we will bring the declaration as well as the Gazette notice to them. Things are going to be returned to them through iTLTB, and they will be able to deal with their land as they would want for it to be dealt with as they wish.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, thank you for your response to the question. I hope it is part of the planning now, lots of potential for high-value agriculture commodities in Nadarivatu. The honourable Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's Office would recall that in his previous role in IFAD, we started a project in Nadarivatu on high-value agriculture commodities.

Will that be part of the handover if we can start looking into the potentials and how Government can also assist them in the utilisation of the land that will now be given back to them because there is huge potential? The climatic conditions in Nadarivatu is different, and it is favourable for these high-value agricultural products.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have spoken with the honourable Tunabuna. The intent of Government on returning this huge parcel of land is not just to give it back. We want to give it back with a package. We want to give it back with suggestions. We want to bring to them platforms on which they are and will be able to work with investors and businesspeople. When we travel up to Nadarivatu, we intend to travel up with cooperatives and the Ministry of Agriculture. We are hoping to also take up Unit Trust of Fiji as well as Fijian Holdings - organisations that will not only be able to provide the skillset and the technical expertise and advice, but also financial institutions that will be able to guide them make their decision.

We have been to Nadarivatu, you have been to Nadarivatu, honourable Leader of the Opposition, and you are quite right. That place is just the right environment for high-yield agricultural products. We are hoping that once we complete this process, we will see landowners flourish in the land that they have been deprived of for a very long time.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, were there any structures at all built on that piece of land? The land has been returned. Were there any structures at all built by the State on that piece of land?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are returning the land that was acquired, the 15,000 acres, but we are taking out and we are going to lease from the landowners, parcels of land where we currently have Government operations. We have an agriculture station, I think, a forestry station and one or two pieces of land where, for example, the depot. We are hoping that we are going to reintroduce the PWD depot there. So, we have worked out that area and we have excluded it from the land we are going to give back to the landowners for public purposes. Where public purpose still remains, we will maintain that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will suspend our proceedings for lunch, but before we do, I remind the Members of the Standing Orders Committee of their meeting in the Small Committee Room immediately following the House suspension.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.31 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, in respect of the fifth Oral Question for today, I have approved the request from the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament for Oral Question 234/2025 to be redirected to the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations as he deals principally with the work compensation issues.

Compensation Scheme - Loss of Life in Boat Accidents  
(Question No. 234/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament whether Government has any plans to develop a compensation scheme for the loss of life in boating accidents, similar to those provided for under the Accident Compensation Act 2017?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Usamate for the question. The existing statutory compensation framework is currently administered through the ACCF, which is focused on motor vehicle accidents. Recent developments, of course, have seen the Ministry of Employment take over dealing with employment and school-related accidents under the existing no-fault compensation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the workers who are injured in boat accidents are covered under the Accident Compensation Act 2017 and their cases are dealt with by my Ministry. However, there is no form of compensation scheme currently to cover passengers. The passengers and their dependents impacted by injury or death at sea rely on litigation remedies for compensation.

This august House is aware that two Bills were presented during the April 2025 Parliament sitting - the Accident Compensation (Amendment) Bill 2015 and the Work Care Bill 2025, which are currently before the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for scrutiny. The amendment to the Accident Compensation Bill 2025 will ensure that ACCF specifically focuses on dealing with motor vehicle accidents, which was the reason for its establishment in 2017.

The compensation payment to victims of motor vehicle accidents are paid from the Motor Vehicle Accident Levy, which is paid by all motor vehicle owners in Fiji to LTA. The ACCF will report to the Minister responsible for transport.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) is developing a third-party insurance scheme to cover loss of life at sea, injuries to passengers or crew, and damage to third-party property. This scheme is still in its early stages. MSAF is currently exploring various models, including international best practices, subject to public consultation before formal implementation.

Sir, MSAF will conduct nationwide public consultations to gather feedback on the proposed insurance frameworks, the funding model, implementation timelines and compliance mechanisms. Stakeholders, including vessel owners, operators, industry representatives and coastal communities, will be invited to participate through written submissions and in-person forums. We will explore the options that not only injured workers or dependents of the deceased workers are compensated but also extend to compensate any mishap to boat passengers as well.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for his answer, and I am glad to see that there are some considerations being done by MSAF, as these concerns were

raised primarily by people in the Rewa Delta who use the Nasali Landing. Is the honourable Minister aware whether that will cover the passengers of those Rewa river boat taxis, because we have had some deaths there recently, whether they would be covered by that arrangement?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the idea is to try and cover as widely as possible - river taxis and any boats that carry passengers are covered.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, kindly note that Oral Question 235 of 2025 has dropped as it has been addressed through the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport.

*(Oral Question No. 235/2025 dropped)*

Fletcher Construction and Percentage Owned by FNPF  
(Question No. 236/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on what percentage of Fletcher Construction does FNPF own?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I answer the question, firstly I would like to correct the answer I gave on Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2025 to honourable Koya. It is about the World Bank Group's debtors as a percentage of the external debt. While adding it, it is the second largest at around 35.7 percent, and the largest is ADB. There are four others that are sharing the rest of the 25.5 percent. Just to give a brief background, Fletcher Construction is a business arm of Fletcher Building Fiji Limited and there are two business arms under Fletcher Building Fiji Limited:

- (1) Construction Business; and
- (2) Road Maintenance Business

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fletcher Building Limited is owned by Higgins Holdings Fiji Property Limited, and that is where FNPF's share is 25 percent, FHL 25 percent and Higgins Group owns 50 percent.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, apart from the actual project at the Westin in which FNPF owns and Fletcher is doing the re-construction, are there any other projects that are owned by FNPF where Fletcher (the actual company that we are talking about now), is a part of the construction or development?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have specific answer to that question whether they are doing any other work but the investment is quite a strategic one by FNPF because FNPF is a large equity investor and has invested in various entities in the tourism industry, financial sector, telecommunications, properties, agriculture, construction, medical amongst others.

All these entities are in companies that are separate legal entities and have their own governance structures, including management, CEO, Board, and also other shareholders and their board representatives. So, all those companies under FNPF, including Fletcher make their own decisions through their own boards and FNPF shareholder does not directly get involved in those decisions. Those decisions are made at arm's length without any major influence by FNPF.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, note the Oral Question No. 237/2025 will be

re-directed to the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development.

Alternative Training Methods to Support Co-operatives  
(Question No. 237/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on the alternative training methods currently being undertaken to support co-operatives?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Tuicolo for his question. Training is an important part of a successful co-operative. It gives members the skills and confidence to manage their enterprises well and work together effectively for the benefit of their communities or their members.

The Department of Cooperatives has expanded its mobile and community-based training programmes, taking learning directly to villages and *tikina* across all Divisions. Since early 2024, they have held over 81 training sessions, reaching more than 1,800 participants. These programmes include cooperative awareness, start and improve your own business, and financial prudence. They focus on governance, group ownership, and accountability at the grassroots level where needed most.

Training in communities has many benefits. It saves cost, increases participation, and allows content to be tailor-made to local needs. Participants can immediately apply what they learn, strengthen their cooperatives, and improve local livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to strengthen the effort, the Government is investing in the renovation of the Co-operative College in Lami, with an allocation of around \$225,000 this financial year. A five-year renovation plan is being developed with the Ministry of Public Works to transform the College into a modern centre for co-operative learning. Currently, Fiji has 837 registered co-operatives across 15 business sectors. Most of their trainings are focused on short courses for participation only. But the next step is to provide an accredited qualification in co-operative management.

The vision for the Co-operative College is to become a fully accredited training institution, recognised by the Fiji Higher Education Commission. We are working with the relevant stakeholders to finalise and accredit both the institution and its curriculum. The plan is to introduce a structured training pathway from Level 1 and 2 - Certificates in Co-operative Management to be offered at the Draunibota Co-operative Training College and Level 3 and 4 Diploma and Degree programmes to be offered through partnerships with local and international universities. This will use a hybrid learning model combining classroom and online training to make education more flexible and accessible to our rural areas as well.

This College will play a key role in empowering youth and women to take part in co-operative enterprises and small business ventures. By getting accredited qualifications, they can become professional co-operative managers and entrepreneurs, contributing to economic growth in their communities, villages, *tikina* and provinces.

Modern technology will be central to this vision, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Digital tools such as online learning, mobile banking and e-commerce platforms will help co-operatives improve management, marketing and financial transparency. This will connect rural co-operatives to wider markets and opportunities both, locally and regionally.

The Co-operative College will not only serve Fiji, but also become a regional hub for co-operative education, knowledge sharing, and innovation across the Pacific. We will position Fiji as a leader in co-operative development and strengthen our regional partnership.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Co-operative College is the key to the future of the co-operative movement in Fiji – education, technology, youth and women to create strong, modern and inclusive co-operatives. Through these initiatives, we are investing not only in individual learning but also in the collective progress and resilience of our national co-operative sector.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question, how will the revival of the co-operative college ensure that it does not fall back into neglect in the future?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Sustainability will come through as I mentioned, accreditation and partnerships. Once the College is recognised by the Fiji Higher Education Commission, it will operate as a professional training institution, generating income from course fees and partnership. Regular maintenance and performance reviews will also be built into the 5-Year Development Plan to ensure continuity and accountability.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has mentioned the training institution. My concern is what are the cybersecurity and data integrity considerations for cloud-based co-operative training ecosystems, especially for co-operatives that are in remote areas?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is part of the strategic plan or the plans of the co-operative to ensure that the technology or online training that is needed is put in place before the training is provided.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as in the last Question, please, note that Question No. 238/2025 will be redirected to the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications.

Mobile Phone Connectivity and Network Coverage  
(Question No. 238/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament on steps taken by the Government to improve mobile phone connectivity and network coverage in Taveuni, particularly in areas where residents currently experience little to no service?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question regarding steps taken to improve mobile phone connectivity in Taveuni. I will also take the opportunity to mention the broader progress of Fiji's telecommunications sector. However, before I do that, I wish to acknowledge the honourable Kamikamica for the great work he has done in his previous role, when communications was under his responsibility – thank you, Sir.

I am also happy to note that the honourable Leader of the Opposition has taken a very close interest and concern in the developments in Vanua Levu, in this particular case, Taveuni also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government recognises that mobile connectivity is essential for daily life, economic activity, public safety, emergency response and social inclusion. Guided by the National Development Plan and the National Digital Strategy 2025 to 2030, we are committed to ensuring that no Fijians, regardless of location, are left without access to reliable connectivity.

For Taveuni, the Government recognises the importance of Taveuni as an integral part of Fiji's economy, being our third largest island and a unique medium-sized island economy with vast potential to grow its national contribution through agriculture, tourism and exports. As the Garden Island of Fiji, Taveuni plays a significant role in driving exports of high-value crops and strengthening rural livelihoods. Agriculture in Taveuni supplies an estimated 60 percent to 70 percent of Fiji's *dalo* exports, underscoring its national importance. I may sound biased saying this, but the best *dalo* is grown in Taveuni.

(Laughter)

This means there is enormous potential for further growth in the agricultural sector, particularly with better connectivity to support supply chains, access to markets, and the use of digital tools in farming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am a son of Taveuni and I understand firsthand the challenges that our communities on the islands continue to face when it comes to mobile phone connectivity and reliable access to telecommunication services. Today, Taveuni is serviced by six Vodafone towers and five Digicel towers, providing coverage across most of the island. Together, both operators support over 9000 active SIM cards in Taveuni, demonstrating the growing demand for digital connectivity and communication services among residents, farmers, tourism operators and visitors.

Over the past few years, both major operators have upgraded most of their networks in Taveuni from the legacy 2G and 3G services up to 4G LTE, improving mobile data speeds and call quality for local communities. These upgrades mean that residents of Taveuni, including those in villages that historically had weaker signals can increasingly access the internet on their phones and devices.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we recognise there are still pockets of Taveuni with weak or no mobile connectivity, especially in areas where communities have expanded into previously unconnected regions. The Ministry and the Telecommunication Authority of Fiji (TAF) will continue to focus on these areas to ensure that improved connectivity supports the growth of Taveuni's economy and its communities. I have the coverage map here, Sir, from both operators and I can easily share it with the honourable Leader of the Opposition, it just basically depicts where the weak spots and the red spots are.

The Ministry and TAF constantly encourage operators to invest in new or upgraded base stations to target these remaining coverage gaps, particularly in the remote parts of Taveuni. To put this in perspective, Fiji already has over 96 percent population coverage with 3G and about 92 percent with 4G, as of recent reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a cornerstone of our strategy to connect all Fijians, including those in Taveuni's hard-to-reach areas, is through the Universal Service Obligation (USO) Project. Under the Telecommunications Act, all licenced operators contribute a levy to Universal Service Fund, dedicated to expanding communication access in underserved areas. This Fund will enable us to deploy an innovative solution in remote communities. A satellite-based managed *Wi-Fi* network model using Low Earth Orbit (LEO) technology. Starlink is perhaps the most well-known company that expanded the use of LEOs.

The solution will have a small satellite disc and solar-powered *Wi-Fi* hotspot installed in the community, linking through the satellite constellation to provide broadband internet to phones and devices in the vicinity.

In Phase 1 of this project, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 126 rural sites across Fiji are being equipped with satellite-supported *Wi-Fi* connectivity at a cost of about \$3 million. This initiative will directly benefit over 11,000 Fijians who have been excluded for far too long.

For Taveuni and other rural areas, coverage gap assessments are being undertaken by the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji, and this will form the next phase of deployment sites. Once assessed and implemented, Taveuni communities currently without mobile reception, will receive an immediate connectivity solution.

The Universal Service Rollout is truly a game-changer for rural connectivity in Fiji. Once implemented, villagers in remote parts of Taveuni will be able to make *WhatsApp*, *Viber* or *Messenger* calls, access e-government services or receive emergency messages via an interlink in their village.

This resilient system features solar power with two-day power autonomy and remote monitoring, exemplifying our commitment to bridging the digital divide.

I take this opportunity to mention the 5G, as I have alluded to earlier. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to inform Parliament that Fiji has recently entered the 5G era. This particular project has three phases. We are now moving on to Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 -Taveuni is included in Phase 3.

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

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before my supplementary question, I just want to assure the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications that due to his absence from Taveuni, I am making the visits because I think he is now concentrating more in Naitasiri.

Let me convey to the honourable Minister, Sir, that stakeholders in Taveuni appreciated the response that was given to their concern, probably to the then honourable Minister. The problem was fixed. According to them, a helicopter came and probably did some movements in the disc, et cetera, only for a while, and then it sort of got worse again. I will just plead with the honourable Minister if we are looking at the 5G plans, again, the importance of the economy, if the honourable Minister can give an assurance that they will relook at the issue again.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is well noted.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his response. He spoke very broadly on connectivity and not specifically on Taveuni. Of course, he spoke on Taveuni but broadly as well.

As a new honourable Minister responsible for Communications, I would like to ask him, how is he going to improve the connectivity even in urban centres? People are facing problems with connectivity – on and off the internet comes, it goes. It is becoming a big problem, even in Parliament we face that and at home – it drops. Yet, the consumers keep paying the bill, but they are not receiving that level of service.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, that is well noted. This is just my first week, it is not an excuse but we will look into that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick question. I am not sure if you might be able to answer this now, but with the roll-out of 5G that is currently happening around Viti Levu, et

cetera, will all your work that is required in Taveuni coincide with rolling out the 5G in Taveuni?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just mention at this point. There are three phases as alluded to earlier. This is a clear, deliberate project by the relevant authorities.

Phase 1 - 2025 to 2026, the focus will be on the economic centres and tourism hubs in Suva, Nadi and Denarau, ensuring our busiest corridors and facilities can immediately access. This is the high profile one.

Phase 2 - 2026 and 2027, expands 5G to Nasinu, Lami, Labasa and Savusavu extending the benefits from the Northern Division and to urban areas.

Phase 3 - 2027 and 2028, by 2028, major towns like Nausori, Sigatoka, Navua, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki, Korovou including Taveuni is also included in this phase here.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Koya, you are on Phase 1, I can answer that.

Update on Pacific Resilience Facility  
(Question No. 239/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on the Pacific Resilience Facility?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) was established by the Pacific leaders to build a resilient of communities to the impact of climate change and disaster events. The PRF is the region's first Pacific-led member-owned and managed regional financing facility and the first of its kind. This new financial institution seeks to address the critical gaps in global financing, architecture and ensure predictable financing can be accessed by vulnerable Pacific communities.

For decades, we have struggled with the procedures and requirements that have hampered our ability to access global finance. The finance we have accessed is often managed by third parties, fragmented and ill-equipped to provide direct support to communities.

Standards and safeguards based on international blueprints continue to complicate and even prevent our efforts to directly fund community-based projects and few of our financing arrangements who are well positioned to support the range of small but meaningful investment that we need to replicate across hundreds of villages and communities across the Pacific. The PRF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Pacific's homegrown financial innovation in action and seeks to enhance tangible interventions to increase our resilience to climate emergency.

The PRF will provide simplified access to finance and not contribute to the over-boarding of debt. The PRF concept was established by the Pacific leaders in 2017 and post-COVID, the PRF model was revived to produce a reframed and redesigned PRF concept that was endorsed by the leaders in 2023.

Over the course of this process, there has been a proactive effort to fundraise and capitalise this new financing arrangement. To-date, US\$167 million has been pledged by international partners and Pacific Islands Forum members. The aim is to raise US\$500 million by 2026 and move towards a total capitalisation of US\$1.5 billion by 2030. The PRF will provide both, grant for communities,

as well as broader grants for climate and disaster resilience project for Pacific Governments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in August 2024, at the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum Meeting, a decision was taken to domicile this new institution in the Kingdom of Tonga. Following that decision, a legal drafting group was established to draw up an international treaty, establishing this new institution while progressing the work required to operationalise the PRF through the development of policies, procedures and fund design.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier this year at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Honiara, the honourable Prime Minister, along with other leaders, signed the treaty establishing the PRF, and member countries now have begun the process of ratification. Fiji, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Solicitor General's Office will be preparing this ratification document for deposit in due course.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, high-level events have been convened in the margins of this year's United Nations General Assembly and the World Bank Annual Meetings to further garner support for the PRF and Pacific's proactive effort to develop a sustainable regional financing arrangement.

At COP30 in Brazil, we will continue to work as a region to build support and awareness to this initiative. While advocacy and fundraising efforts remain critical, the technical process of developing the governance, arrangement, and policies of the facility is equally important. Officials from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Solicitor-General's Office and the Ministry of Finance will continue to engage in the consultation and legal co-drafting groups tasked with aligning the designing of the groundbreaking regional facility with the vision of Pacific leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the unique needs and challenges of the Pacific Island countries will not be met if we depend on the blueprints and models of international organisations and funds that are not orientated and designed around a clear understanding of our context and needs.

We continue to recognise the importance of designing national and regional funds and funding mechanisms from bottom up and now, have a landscape of homegrown funds and financing arrangements that we must continue to nurture and grow from major regional initiatives such as the PRF. We increasingly recognise the importance of defining the financial architecture around us and the risk involved with relying too heavily on external financial models to shape our future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to work closely with the Pacific neighbours and regional organisations to ensure PRF can deliver effectively. We expect the first call for proposal for community projects to be launched at the 55th Pacific Islands Leaders Forum Meeting convened in Palau in August 2026, with the granting to commence in early 2027.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is critical to get that design right and ensure that the Pacific Resilience Facility establishes itself as a fundamental and long-term part of a collective resilience building effort.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, can you briefly explain to us how the Resilience Facility will be governed because it is owned by our own. How will it be governed?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently it is governed through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. They are the ones that are managing it and are currently managing the fund and those that will be depositing or pledging into this. So far, a total of \$167 million from 13 capital investors have deposited a pledge including the Pacific Island countries such as Nauru and Solomon Islands and other international partners. It is managed by PIFS.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate the honourable Minister for being labelled the climate champion of Fiji. Congratulations, honourable Bulitavu!

On the Pacific Resilience Facility, it is clear, and you have stated that the grant calls will be open in 2027. Honourable Minister, can you highlight how many Pacific Island nations would be able to benefit from this Facility? Is there any particular key area in Fiji that we are looking into which is a locally owned initiative that is sustainable and resilient?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a good question from honourable Rinesh Sharma. It just started, as I have said, we are still moving around to get pledges from the Pacific Island countries and also the international communities and partners.

At the same time, this is specifically homegrown, as I have alluded to in my answer, and it will benefit all Pacific communities, so all countries in the Pacific will benefit. How will Fiji benefit? Fiji will have direct access to predictable community grants and can align its project pipeline. Climate resilience measures, relocation and rural electrification – these are some of the areas that will be covered through this PRF funding window.

### Written Questions

#### Financial Assistance Provided to Affected Farmers (Question No. 240/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on the specific types of financial assistance and non-monetary support provided, to date, to affected farmers with respect to the following:

- (a) cane cutters, lorry owners, drivers, and co-operatives who have lost income; and
- (b) incurred additional costs due to the disruption caused by the Rarawai Mill fire?

<sup>1</sup> HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to table my response.

#### Projects Under Rural and Outer Island Programme (Question No. 241/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the following –

- (a) number of projects carried out under the Rural Outer Island Programme for the period January 2023 to June 2025: and
- (b) number of projects under construction under the Rural Outer Island Programme to date?

<sup>2</sup> HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby rise to table my response.

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 240/2025, tabled by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

<sup>2</sup> Reply to Written Question No. 241/2025, tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure II.

Teachers Assaulted by Parents/Guardians/Students  
(Question No. 242/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the number of teachers who were assaulted by parents/guardians or by students in the school premises in the last three years (2023-2025)?

<sup>3</sup> HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I table my response in accordance to the Standing Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that we have two Bills to deal with today. The first will be for debate, vote and enactment; and the second Bill will be moved under Standing Order 51.

We will now deal with the first Bill and I remind honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament yesterday, Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2025, debate on the Bill will be limited to one hour.

**FISHERIES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025**

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 5th November, 2025, I move:

That the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 33 of 2025), be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I alluded to yesterday, Fiji's marine and freshwater resources are facing increased pressures from exploitation, unsustainable harvesting practices, pollution, the effects of climate change and habitat degradation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the importance of this amendment Bill is that Fiji's main coastal fisheries law, the Fisheries Act 1941 is too old to handle modern problems and emerging threats. The old law is not effective at managing this, and the Government's goal is to create a fit to purpose law that protects these resources for current and future generations.

This Bill gives the Ministry the modern tools and mechanisms it needs to actually enforce the law. Before, the only way to punish offenders was to take them to court, which was cumbersome, time consuming and costly. This Bill introduces the Inshore Fisheries Fixed Penalty Notice. Think of it as a speed ticket. For minor offences, an officer can issue an immediate fine. This is much faster, cheaper and a more effective deterrent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the old law limited officers' powers to just searching vessels. The new Bill gives authorised officers clear powers to search land premises, including markets or processing facilities where illegal fish might be sold.

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 242/2025, tabled by the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

Currently, the Ministry can only cancel a licence after someone is convicted in court. The new Bill allows the Ministry to suspend or cancel a licence for specific breaches once it is committed. This Bill is also crucial for protecting the food and income of the 850 coastal communities that depend on these resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a key change. The Bill proposes to remove the word “honorary” from Honorary Fish Wardens. This simple change is vital because it allows the Ministry to move towards remunerating them. Fish wardens and local community members who are trained and given legal authority to patrol their own traditional fishing grounds. By paying them, the Bill makes them more effective at combating illegal fishing activities and protecting their communities’ own livelihood from poachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill's purpose is to stop unsustainable harvesting practices and exploitation. For resource owners and local communities, this means protecting their source of food security and livelihoods. If a person’s application for a fishing licence is denied, or the existing licence is cancelled, the new Bill gives them a clear appeal provision. This allows them to officially appeal the decision to the Minister, giving a voice to small-scale fishers.

The Bill also sets higher penalties and, importantly, creates separate penalties for individuals versus companies. This means, a large commercial operator that breaks or commits a breach, will face a much larger fine - up to \$50,000, than a local individual, making the penalties more balanced. In short, this Bill updates an 80-year-old law to give the Government and local communities the power to properly manage and protect Fiji's fisheries from modern threats, ensuring there are fish for both food and income for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill gives officers the authority to follow the evidence of illegal fishing wherever it leads, not just on water. This is one of the most significant amendments in the Bill, where authorised officers enter and search land premises, such as markets and processing factories, or even a house, if they have a good reason to believe that illegal fishing or fishing gear has been hidden there. The old law mostly limited them to searching boats.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, authorised officers also can keep their power to board and search any fishing vessel or other boat they suspect is involved in illegal fishing. Authorised officers, including fisheries officers, police officers or customs officers, can stop anyone and require them to produce their fishing licence, their fishing gear and their entire catch. Officers are also given clear powers to detain people who are suspected of committing an offence. They can also detain the person's vessel, fishing gear and their catch while the case is being investigated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before, officers could catch someone with illegal fish or catch on the fishing boat, but now they could easily go after the person on land who is buying and selling it. Now, they have the powers to follow the entire chain. They can search the boat, detain the fisher, and then go to the market or processing facility where the catch has been sold. This makes it much harder for people to profit from illegal fishing. To make sure this works, the law also introduces very high fines for anyone who obstructs or refuses to let an officer do their job - up to \$20,000 for an individual or \$50,000 for a company.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to make every effort to ensure that its legal instruments that are developed during this review process are done in a conducive manner with the Marine Resource Unit's interests at the heart, and the emerging demands of the coastal fisheries sector in Fiji are appropriately addressed. *Vinaka saka.*

MR. SPEAKER.- You will note that the honourable Minister was given eight minutes only to introduce her Bill, and that means the speaking time for each of the intervenors will be limited to five minutes each until the last eight minutes of the hour, which will then be given back to the honourable Minister to close the debate with her right of reply. Now, the floor is open, and I invite any Member who wishes to contribute to the debate on the Bill.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak in support of the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025. I congratulate the honourable Minister for Fisheries for bringing this 80-year-old law into Parliament to be changed to suit the times we live in today.

In my province of Nadroga/Navosa, we fish in this inshore area, we do not fish beyond the reef. This is from the coastal area all the way from Namatakula, all the way to Momi and those areas, and it is very important for us to protect our fishing.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, our tourism operators are also based on the beaches, and the in-shore fishing area is also part of the recreation area of the resorts. It is important for the growth of tourism that we preserve the marine life in those coastal areas. As you know, nature today is a huge part of tourism and people come to Fiji, our natural resources is a huge part of the attraction.

We also want to see a lot more Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and now that we take stewardship of in-shore fishing areas, for some of us, there will be in the MPA or the *tabu*. I remember in my district of Cuvu, we had *tabu* for five years and it is amazing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the way marine life regenerates. Within months from my balcony, I could see a *saga* on the beach near the water, and I live about 20 yards from the sea, and I could see a travelly. That is what happens when your MPA, when your *tabu* is put in place.

What we have here is better stewardship for our people to realise that they cannot abuse their fishing areas. They have to take ownership of it, and this is one way of strengthening that ownership by ensuring that anyone who does not follow or observe this will be penalised in the manner that has been prescribed.

I would also like to see our people have fishing licences. It gives formality, legitimacy to the way they carry out their businesses or their daily lives. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with tourism, we have this MSME Programme that was piloted last year, and it is happening again this year, which will continue to be part of tourism. One thing that we noticed was that, people have been operating businesses without the formalities. They are not legitimate.

I want to see all people at the ground level to start formalising what they have. There is one way of encouraging that, if you are a fisherman, get a licence. If you are running a business, an MSME, have it registered. For MSMEs, you are talking about taxpayers' funds, and we want to help them, but we cannot, because they are not legitimate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is one way of encouraging stewardship for something that is dear to us, that is, our natural resources and especially fisheries, and I fully support this Bill.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to contribute to the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025.

My contribution will be based on the penalties and fines dealt under section 8(1) and section 9(2)(b). In the short time that I had a glance of the Bill, prompted me to quantify the penalties and to try and identify if there was special concession to resource owners holding licences and would fish in their own traditional *i qoliqoli* areas. I was surprised that there is no concession given, and thus

the question that I raised yesterday, this was the reason.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was surprised that the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General became emotional and questioned what I had done for the resource owners when I was in government. I was surprised that the Bill did not cover my contribution to the resource owners as the previous Minister for Fisheries.

For the benefit of the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, I could list the amount of work that I had carried out, visiting all the islands in Fiji, and contributing to their livelihood which also included the smallest community in Nagelelevu in Cakaudrove. All the visits that I have done included the resource owners.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to time limitation, I will not be able to list the work carried out by the Ministry of Fisheries from 2017 to 2022. However, I wish to address the Bill as a consequent and repercussions to resource owners, as there is a need to relate this Bill to the resource owners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill will basically penalise the resource owners, if they carry out any illegal activity within their *i qoliqoli* areas. This Bill will penalise people who collect *kai* in the rivers and seashells along the coast. This Bill will penalise them. If they carry out any illegal activity, they will fall under this umbrella.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the EEZ in Fiji is managed by Government. Fishing vessels pay fees to go and fish. The resource owners, they have not been given funds. We had worked out a funding mechanism, where fees are paid to resource owners, averaging from \$1,000 to \$5,000, depending on the level of the fishing activities and the resources that is taken out of their *i qoliqoli*. That scale basically gives them the opportunity to benefit from the resources.

What the Government is doing now is actually penalising them, without giving money to the resource owners, so that they can be paid for being depleted with their resources and the resources that are within their *i qoliqoli* be taken out. We are basically putting the cart before the horse! I urge Government to pull this back. Let the fees be qualified, be given to all the fishermen that go out and fish in the *i qoliqoli*. They pay the normal fees from \$1,000 to \$5,000, and then you include the traditional *i qoliqoli* owners under this Bill. Even if they are charged and penalised, they are benefiting from their own resources. This is the main question!

I am asking Government to withdraw this Bill, and I understand that there is going to be another Bill that will be brought back to Parliament, so include this Bill within that because that will gel in with the other Bill.

The resource owners have been paid for the utilisation of their own resources. Then, when you put out this Bill and penalise them under these sections, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is \$40,000, three months, six months, we are not compensating them.

Let us compensate them for the resources that they are losing. Pay them the resources and then charge them and you can fine them. However, you are basically hitting them hard on both occasions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the motion and I want to speak from the perspective of a resource owner, someone who was in our committee of our *Qoliqoli Cokovata* for Cakaudrove/Tunuloa which, I, and the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources are a part of.

From the perspective of traditional resource owners, I can say that I support this Bill. For us, the *Qoligoli Cokovata* for Cakaudrove/Tunuloa, is a well-formed committee with members who fully rely on the inclusive agreement of all the Turaga ni Yavusa within our *i qoligoli*. That is something that I believe we have started, and not only the processes we get from those that pay fees are channelled to good use in terms of scholarships.

Whenever we have meetings and complaints come up in terms of illegal fishing going on, mind you, I believe this Bill is specifically for those who are fishing for commercial purposes and as for us as resource owners and as custodians of our *i qoligoli* and even those who are in the Vola ni Kawa Bula are given a fee to pay which is lower than those not in the Vola ni Kawa Bula, specifically to ensure that they can maximise the use of their own *i qoligoli*.

In terms of sustainability, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we only give out or endorse 25 licences per year for *sasalu* (seafood) and deep-sea fishing. I fully support the Bill as it is because it will assist us, as traditional resource owners, in terms of looking after the welfare of what is being given to us for free. For us, even after all this time, we have trained the wardens to look after the *i qoligoli*, what we can only do after that is just sit from the shore and look at the ocean and see people doing illegal fishing, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for us, on this perspective as a member of a traditional *i qoligoli* owner, I fully support the Bill, and I look forward to its implementation with the inclusion of the fines because that is something that we really need as a deterrent.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the Bill.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to contribute, and the intent of the Bill is good. We are only asking Government if you can just give it a bit of time to go and really look at some of the concerns, but it is entirely up to Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were a part of this, and it started from honourable Osea Naiqamu's time. We know that we have an archaic law, and if we look at the *iTaukei* administration, I can say in my own observation that things about our land are well structured as compared to our marine resources, probably because of the development that the immediate developers did back then, but it is time that we re-look at this. However, we have to be careful as well because of cross-cutting issues and how it affects the different stakeholders and the benefits out of it, not only in terms of food and nutrition security, but most importantly, economic security as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, we have been a part of this, and it took three years. We have done three years of consultation prior to the Elections in 2022. I remember, two provinces, Cakaudrove and Ba, who had strong objections on parts of this Bill. I am not sure if Government is aware of that, but probably that is something that we need to go back into.

They have raised some of their concerns. As I have stated, the intent is good, but there are also some concerns from our own communities, meaning *iTaukei* communities, meaning *i qoligoli* owners, and we need to listen carefully to that because the responsibility of this august House, is that whenever we pass a Bill for that purpose, we ensure that all the key concerns and the good intentions behind it are all achieved and, of course, sets up well for the future.

I have talked about the structures. Honourable Tunabuna knows very well what they went through in Tikina Nadi, in Bua, where his village, and probably a few others, have decided not to be part of the *tikina* because of the governance structure. As we all know and if I may say it in the *iTaukei* vernacular, *na i qoligoli na i kanakana cokovata, e lewai tikoga mai cake. Sa saini ga mai o*

*Turaga na Ratu mai Ucuna, o iratou kece na Turaga ni Yavusa i Verata, e sega tale ni dua e qai levea.*” That was the problem they had. When Buli Nadi signed, they had problems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some issues, and we need to approach this very, very carefully. There are benefits in it but let us be aware because it will affect us. *Na noda veiwekani* and, of course, it makes it difficult for Veitarogi Vanua and the i Taukei Administration. Perhaps, the big concern is on the penalty.

Honourable Minister, when it was developed, there were two components of the licensing. One was the licence access fee, and that is what the former Minister was saying, that was supposed to go to the resource owners so that the resource owners can benefit, and the capital they gain from it, can be used for other activities.

We need to empower the wardens. Most of the boats and engines are coming from the Ministry of Fisheries. If we can sustain and resource our own activities, then we can be in a better position to police our own because if we cannot influence it, then we do not own it! Just like our big EEZ, we need the resources. That is why the establishment of the licensing then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was under two categories - the licencing access fee that goes to the resource owners, and I think there are categories too within that, taking into consideration the special circumstances and needs of the *i qoliqoli* owners. Then we have the management administration fee, which is the one that goes to Government. Again, the concern is how they will be affected because of the penalty clause. We leave it to Government. The intention is good, but we have also raised our humble plea to Government.

We can just quickly go and have a look at this, bring it again in the next sitting of Parliament, which is just in two weeks' time. Perhaps, give it to the Committee, but let us get a good Bill rather than just rushing it, and then we have some problems later.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion raised by the honourable Minister for Fisheries. As a traditional *i qoliqoli* owner for the *i qoliqoli* of the *Vanua o Saivou* and Nalawa in Ra, I wish to make my contribution this afternoon.

I believe the Opposition has taken this out of context. This Bill only deals with minor amendments, particularly on the issue of deterrence, particularly on the raising of fines and other preliminary issues that are discussed in the Bill, which for me, will assist *i qoliqoli* owners. It will particularly empower fish wardens, the Turaga ni Koro and those who are already available there on our coastal villages, especially for those villages who have *i qoliqoli*.

To go out of the context as stated by honourable Koroilavesau and the honourable Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot believe that they will go that far because this Bill is only on the regulations, particularly on the fines and minor amendments! It will help *i qoliqoli* owners, particularly on the issue of sustainability and conservation. It will conserve our *i qoliqoli*.

As the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has elaborated on, the fees that are no longer there in our *i qoliqoli* will come back because there are a lot of illegal fishing going on in our *i qoliqoli*. There is, no doubt, about that, it is going on, so this law will make work easier for Fisheries Officers and the Ministry of Fisheries. We do not have to go to court and prolong all these cases with evidence, but it will become more like a strict liability offence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is particularly on that. I do not know why the Opposition is going that far to make it more political in this august House. It is a good move. Honourable Minister for Fisheries, I congratulate you on this amendment, and I support the Bill before this august House.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for once, both sides of the House are talking about the paramount and the safeguarding of *iTaukei* interests and customary rights. We hear the Opposition, we hear from this side, and that is exactly the intention here. However, I will restrict my contributions in terms of the law.

There seems to be a misunderstanding. The Bill that honourable Koroilavesau and the honourable Leader of the Opposition are referring to is about to come. This one is just to address the inadequacy in terms of enforcement. They have been advised by the DPP that they cannot rely on a policy. That is why we have addressed it, so that we can address the problem we have now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may note, this is a 1941 Act. What did the Opposition do during their time? We have fixed this. I am told that by the first quarter of next year, we will bring in the inshore fisheries. This is only to address the inadequacy.

If you look at Clause 4, it empowers the Minister to appoint authorised officers, which enables the creation of a multi-agency enforcement mechanism, allowing Fisheries, Police and Customs Officers to act jointly, strengthening surveillance and rapid response, especially in coastal and border areas. There is a provision where you can appoint, where you can exempt villagers from licence, and the Minister has that power. Not everyone in the village needs to have a licence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why? That is covered in the Bill which is currently being vetted by the Solicitor-General's Office because that will undergo wider consultation. We acknowledge the problem, we are here to fix it, so that our enforcement officers can actually go and do the work. What I encourage the Opposition is that we need to support the Ministry of Fisheries and the important work that they do. Let us support and show where our commitment lies by supporting this Bill.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think, as has been stated, the Bill, to some extent, addresses the big problem that has occurred in terms of inshore fishing. I remember when I was part of the Committee on Natural Resources a few years ago, fishermen told us that they now have to pay four times more fuel to catch the same amount of fish that they used to catch in the past.

We understand that there are a lot of issues with illegal fishing. I am looking at some of the definitions, the way things have been addressed in the definitions, and some of the Clauses are actually addressing some of those problem areas that Fisheries have faced in the past, especially to do with the illegal fishers who come into areas that they should not be. Those high penalties should be there for those people and the Fisheries Officers should be allowed to investigate them also on the land because people hide the bad things that they do.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think there are some concerns on our part, which is not properly addressed here. What about the issue of *i qoliqoli* landowners who are not full-time fishermen, but catch fish every now and then and sell? In that one, I have looked at the Bill itself, and section 13 of the Act, et cetera, has no exemption under that provision for that type of person. This is the concern that we have.

(Hon. S.D. Turaga interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is my time to talk, honourable Attorney-General.

Before, the limitations of running this Bill were limited to Fisheries Officers but now, you are opening it up to a wider range of people. Now, when you delegate your authorities to more people, two things happen, first, you get speed of effort, but you get less control. Delegation leads to this. You get speed of getting things done, but you have less control.

When you have less control, and I have looked at all the people that you have here, the various parties that will be having the authority to issue these penalties, you lose control of what they do. You might say, Sir, that there are exemptions, what about the person who catches fish and makes *pasela* (parcels) and sells on Koro Island? The policeman or the other person can also arrest this person because he does not have a fishing licence. These are some of the concerns that I have. The exemption that you have, I tried to look at the Bill, the Act itself, I could not find it.

There are some concerns that have been expressed here by honourable Koroilavesau about how the people who do not actually own the *i qoliqoli*, have the rights to the *i qoliqoli*, they should be earning that money to help them to engage in fishing. I also have this particular concern. When you delegate to a broader group of people, you lose effective control over them. There is also an opportunity then for bribery and all of these things that happen outside the control because it happens all the time. These are the realities of the situation; they can do this. They can also interpret things that can have an impact on the people who go out and fish, just to sell fish here.

When you go to the villages, people are selling fish. Someone who does not understand the mindset of what you have in fisheries, would use that and treat that person as an unlicensed trader and penalise them. That is one of my concerns that I have, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These are some of the concerns that need to be ironed out. The honourable Attorney-General is saying there are some exceptions, I have not seen that in this, and I have also not seen it in the Act that exists.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a lot of caution about this. When you extend power to the policemen and you do not have much control over them, how are they going to react to the powers that are given to them when they interact with these people - whether fishermen coming from other parts of the country, or the *i qoliqoli* owners themselves who are trying to catch the fish for sustenance of their families or maybe, just selling some to help their own lives? That is one of my concerns.

HON. M.D. BULIUTAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, mine will be from the perspective of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. We are totally in support of the Bill for an Act to amend the Fisheries Act of 1941 on the basis of biodiversity protection and conservation. We have issues of overfishing now and the equipment that are now in the definition, for example, the definition on “fishing gear”, which reads, and I quote: “...hydraulically or otherwise assisted by mechanical or electrical means.”. These are things that is now in the definition of “fishing gear”.

We have been going around the maritime areas. In the last few months, one of the honourable Ministers in this august House went diving, through a submarine, in the Yasawa Waters. One of the findings we found from that dive when we went down about 200 metres through the submarine was the lack of fish that is there which shows the overfishing that is happening. Mr. Speaker, Sir, for us to restore our fisheries, we need this kind of measures to be put in place, through the law, that will give teeth to the prosecutors and enforcers so that they are able to clamp down, which would also act as a deterrent to those who are doing illegal activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue that was raised by honourable Koroilavesau and the honourable Leader of the Opposition on the *i qoliqoli*, as alluded to by the honourable Acting Attorney-General, what they have raised will come in the Amendment Bill that will be coming next and that is where we will deal with that.

However, rest assured, and to all *i qoliqoli* owners and iTaukei that this Bill does not affect our customary fishing rights. It enforces the fact that we are able to conserve and preserve our *i qoliqoli*, *me rawa ni katoa tikoga na noda i qoliqoli* [so that there is abundance in our traditional fishing grounds]. *Ena sega ga ni yavalata na noda dodonu vaka i taukei ni qoliqoli*. [It will not undermine our rights as owners of our traditional fishing grounds.] That should be understood, while

there could be many twists on the narrative of this, on different political point-scoring that is happening, however, the main aim is to preserve our *i qoliqoli* and increase enforcement.

As I have already said, the issue of not only overfishing, as the honourable Minister had alluded to in her opening statement, but also on degradation, pollution, as well as the issue of plastics in our *i qoliqoli* and coral reefs, which we are currently fighting against.

I thank the honourable Minister for Fisheries for bringing this Amendment Bill to the House, which will surely help the efforts of both Ministries - my Ministry and the Ministry she runs, on protecting our oceans.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what needs to be said is that I do not think anyone in this House is in disagreement with what has been done via this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister, right at the outset, pointed out that this is really to stop the exploitation and unsustainable harvesting practices. We all agree, we all want the same thing, but what our side of the House is really referring to was perfectly reflected in what the former Minister for Fisheries has actually said. I do not think it interferes with *i qoliqoli*, et cetera, but it would be wrong to say that it is only about the punishment because it is not.

If you read this correctly, the Explanatory Notes that are at the back of the Bill will tell you that it covers a whole lot more than just the punishment for actually doing it. Sir, if I could just quickly go through the Clauses, Clause 2 deals with definitions of authorised officers, fishing gear, owner, penalty notice, person and vessel.

Clause 4 deals with the Minister's power to appoint these particular officers.

Clause 5 deals with the powers of search and seizure and examination. These are very important matters when it comes to the law, Sir, as you would know very well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even further on, you are talking about the cancellation of a particular licence, and as raised by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, there are particular Provinces around the country that have some reservations. They are not saying, "Do not do it", there are reservations on how it is done. So, all we were asking is, we support this idea, but it would require a little bit of consultation, like they always say, consultation, consultation, consultation. It requires a little bit of consultation with our resource owners to say, "Is there anything else that you think is probably excluded in here?" The reference by the honourable Acting Attorney-General to an exclusion that exists, and he is talking about Clause 5(3), if I may ask him, you talked about Clause 5(3) in this particular Bill, or Clause 5(3) from the main one?

If there is to be that, it should be contained in here. You need to have that exclusion for and to protect our landowners. Never will you find anyone on this side of the House who is going to do something that is not protecting our resource owners. We are very mindful of that, honourable Attorney-General. Please, be aware of that. We must ensure that, and it is actually guaranteed in this.

The point here is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all we are asking is that the Government seriously think about the fact that we may want to consult some of our resource owners communities to see if they are comfortable with it. It is not something that will require a big exercise because the content of the Bill is not something that we are actually arguing about in terms of the fines and in order to protect the exploitation and unsustainable practices that occur.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to deliver my response in the vernacular.

*Turaga na i Liuliu ni Bose Lawa, au via vakaitavi talega ena kena veitalanoataki tiko na Lawa Vakaturi ena vuku ni noda i qoliqoli. O au e dua na i taukei ni i qoliqoli talega. E virikotori ena lawa tu ni i qoliqoli, na kena vakalawataki na laiseni kei na kena vakaqaqacotaki na vakayagataki ni i qoliqoli me rawati kina na bula vakailavo, oka talega kina na kena tuvani vakavinaka se volai tu vakamatau na veika vakaivola ni waqa ni qoli era la'i vakayagataka na i qoliqoli, na laiseni e gadrevi me vakayagataki ena qoli, na mataqali qoli e vakatabui, kei na totogi ena tau me veiganiti vei ira era vakayagataka vakailoa na noda i qoliqoli. Ia, na lawa tu e oka kina na vakasama ni kena vakayagataki vakamatau na i qoliqoli kei na veika bibi e dodonu me taqomaka ka maroroya, veiganiti na gagadre kei na kena vakayagataki na noda i qoliqoli ena gauna bolebole eda lako curuma tiko 'go.*

*Au vakabauta, Turaga na Sipika, kevaka ena vakadonui na lawa vakaturi e tau tiko mai 'go, e vuqa vei ira na noda era tiko ena noda veikorokoro, na nodra i vurevure ni yau e tiko vakatabakidua ga ena nodra i qoliqoli. E dina ni dua na gauna balavu e tabu tu mai kina na sasalu, ia, ni da lako tiko yani, era tagica tiko na kena vakatarai na sasalu. Ia, au vakawilika tiko kina na Lawa Vakaturi 'go, au vakabauta ni kevaka ena vakaiotaki 'go, sa na rawa ni dola na sasalu mera vakayagataka talega na wekada ena nodra vurevure tiko ni lavo na sasalu ena noda veivanua. Vinaka vakalevu.*

[Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to contribute to the debate on the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025. I am also one of the traditional owners of the *i qoliqoli*. Also included in the Amendment Bill is the legalisation of licences and the strengthening of the usage and management of fishing grounds for financial gain, as well as the appropriate fishing boats/vessels required with necessary equipment, fishing licences required, type of fishing that is prohibited and appropriate penalty given to those who abuse the use of *i qoliqoli*. This Bill includes the sustainable use of the *i qoliqoli* and the important things that must be protected/safeguarded within the *i qoliqoli* currently at this time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that if the Bill is passed and becomes an Act, most of those in villages whose source of income is from the *i qoliqoli* and for a long time now, there has been a ban on fisheries resources but when we go to the villages, they are desperately asking for the lifting of the ban on harvesting of fisheries resources. After reading this Bill, I believe that when passed, it will revoke the ban or prohibition and will allow those in villages to harvest fisheries resources and sell them to help them financially. Thank you.]

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to sincerely thank the honourable Members who have contributed to the debate on the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to assure honourable Members that the Fisheries Act 1941, in its entirety, is currently under review and now sits at the Solicitor-General's Office. We are waiting for comments on our first draft before we can take the Bill out for consultation, and I would like to assure my colleagues on the other side of the House that I have noted the concerns and the comments that they have raised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I would like to ask my colleagues on the other side of the House if they can support this Bill so that the Ministry of Fisheries, the Fisheries Officers and those who are authorised under the Act can carry out and address the deficiency in the current form of the Act.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 33/2025), moved under Standing Order 51, passed and enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. .... of 2025)]

### **ADOPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025**

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34/2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) that the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 7th November, 2025, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with a right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to inform this august House of the proposed amendment to the Adoption Act 2020 and to seek Parliament's endorsement and approval for the Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2025. The purpose of this Bill is to strengthen enforcement, close policy gaps and improve the overall implementation of Fiji's adoption framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Adoption Act 2020 was enacted to modernise Fiji's domestic and inter-country adoption processes, aligning them with Article 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect to Inter-Country Adoption. The Act was designed to ensure that all adoptions are child-centred, uphold the best interests of the child and prevent illegal or unethical practices.

The Adoption Bill 2020 was brought under Fiji Parliament's Standing Order 51. It was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights after being moved under Standing Order 51 on 26th May, 2020, to allow for proper review. However, although the Act was passed in 2020, it was not operationalised until this year, May 2025.

Following its gazettal for enforcement, we realised that there were inconsistencies, making it difficult to fully operationalise the Act. Our Ministry, in collaboration with the Judiciary, the Office of the Solicitor-General and legal practitioners, conducted extensive implementation consultations. These consultations identified a few legal and operational gaps that have hindered the effective enforcement of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consultations highlighted the following pressing issues:

- Inconsistent interpretation and application of certain provisions across the courts.
- Procedural ambiguities that cause unnecessary delays in adoption decisions.

- Weak enforcement mechanisms and unclear institutional roles among responsible authorities.
- Sections 18 and 58 of the Act need urgent amendments to strengthen procedural clarity in enforcement.
- The Act empowers the Minister to make regulations. However, it does not confer authority on the Chief Justice to make rules governing adoption proceedings resulting in procedural limitations within the courts.

Since the operationalisation of the Act, supporting regulations and court rules remain pending, creating uncertainty for both, applicants and legal officers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of October 2025, there is a significant backlog in adoption cases, 194 cases are pending with the Department of Children. The Legal Aid Commission reports an additional 212 pending cases in 2024 and 61 pending as of October 2025, bringing their total to 273. All in all, more than 400 children who could be placed in stable homes are denied this opportunity, as we discuss this amendment.

The urgency of this Bill lies in the need to provide clarity, consistency and efficiency in adoption proceedings, ensuring that the welfare of the child remains paramount. The proposed Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2025 seeks to introduce two key amendments:

- (1) Amendment to section 18 to clarify procedural requirements and define the roles of all agencies involved in the adoption process, including provision for the court to appoint guardians currently, the role lies solely with the Director.
- (2) Amendment to section 58 to strengthen enforcement provisions and enhance administrative transparency, including a new section 58A, granting the Chief Justice the power to make rules governing court proceedings for adoption cases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these amendments are designed to address the current operational challenges and enable the full and effective implementation of the Adoption Act 2020. They will streamline the adoption process, clarify responsibilities, enhance judicial efficiency and ensure alignment with Fiji's international obligations. Above all, these changes will reinforce the principle that every adoption decision must serve the best interests of the child. In light of the urgency and national importance of this matter, I respectfully request that the Bill be considered under Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill represents more than just a legal amendment, it is a reaffirmation of our collective duty to protect, nurture and secure the future of every child in Fiji, and because it is administrative and operationalised in nature, I hope we could consider it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, I will invite honourable Kiran to exercise her Right of Reply.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought you had permitted us to stand up, but once again, I think the Bill appears to be small. It is a small Bill, in fact. I rise again because of the issue of Standing Order 51. While it may appear small, some of the issues that were raised in the debate earlier came to the fore, and I will give you an example.

When we were talking about the issue that I had raised in the Fisheries Bill, I had talked about the danger of it affecting the *i qoliqoli* owners who then catch fish to sell. The Acting Attorney-General had then quoted section 5 of that particular Act, where he says there is an exemption. Section

5(3) of the Act, which he quoted, let me just say what it is, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It says, I am going to give you the example.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, it is out of order. Can you just proceed with that? That is from my ruling. Please, you can address that in some other means, but certainly not when you are debating a different issue.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my point is that the section of the legislation that he had quoted as giving an exemption, if you read it, does not give that exemption. What I am saying is, when we do not have the opportunity to look at the Bill in full through a committee going through the full process, those little things will be left out. I am just pointing out one that has happened right here today, where I checked what the honourable Attorney-General said and found that it was wrong.

When we do not have that opportunity to discuss things fully, to give time, we can then identify these problems. When we are not given that opportunity, giving it today and debating tomorrow, it does not give us enough opportunity to talk to others about this so we can get the other way of looking at things. When you look at something, you will see it only from your point of view. When you give it to us, when we talk to other people, we get other points of view. I am raising this because this just happened today in the Bill that we have just passed. We did not argue against that Bill not because we did not like it, but because we thought there could be some flaws. What he has proposed today was proven here. I have just checked the Bill, which means it is not correct.

MR. SPEAKER.- So, you are not referring to the Adoption (Amendment) Bill, are you?

HON. J. USAMATE.- No, I am talking about the use of power.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Minister has clarified the timelines very well. The timelines are in 2020, the Principal Act was brought into this House, the Bill as it was, and it was passed under Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2020, they failed to operationalise the substantive Bill. They sat with the Act from 2020 until we decided when we came and out of everyone else's complaint, the court system complaint, the Ministry complaint, practitioners' complaint, ultimately those who are affected raised their complaint. The honourable Attorney-General brought it into operation, the honourable Minister brought it into operation, and when it came into operation, they hit hiccups, policy and operational challenges. These challenges are addressed in this Bill. There are quite a few. There are even fewer than the ones that were proposed in the Fisheries Act, and there is a difference.

Yesterday's Bill was proposed by the honourable Minister to correct something that was done many, many years ago. This one is correcting something that they brought into the House in 2020. If we are going to wait another two weeks or wait for another session of Parliament, so the session of Parliament comes to an end in December, then it gets prorogued and then we go back and revive it again next year.

What is going to happen is the numbers that have been cited in this House by honourable Kiran is going to continue to increase and they are going to continue to pile up on the tables of Legal Aid Commission, of the Director for Social Welfare and everyone that we are supposed to be serving are going to continue to be affected. They are very small amendments and again, I do the same exercise that I did yesterday. There is a few of them there, they can allocate these little cosmetic changes all amongst themselves, return 24 hours later and we can still have a decent conversation about this tomorrow. I support the honourable Sashi Kiran in raising this under Standing Order 51.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did not want to speak but just a few clarifications. As a former Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, this particular Report was presented to my Committee under Standing Order 51, as alluded yesterday, no issues of using Standing Order 51. I think the way it was presented today is fine. No issues with that as well, but it went to the Committee honourable Vosarogo.

Still under Standing Order 51, it went to the Committee, the Committee had a vast consultation on this particular Bill. We were initially given 30 days, but we took more than six months to scrutinise this particular Bill. I think this can be verified by the honourable Mosese Bulitavu as well.

One thing that we did place in our recommendation was that all the Bills need to be revisited at least in two years. Our Report stated that all the reports coming to Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the ministries need to revisit after two or three years, and if there is any amendment, it can come to Parliament for amendment; I think that was fine.

The problem here is, when you do this, you start blaming the previous government. It was sitting - 2020 till 2022 then the government change. If I heard right, the Minister said that this particular Bill was operationalised this year. That means from January 2023 or late December 2022 when this Government came in, they were also sitting on it. If they were sitting on it for the past two years, what is the rush to have it passed tomorrow, and not wait for another two weeks? You waited close to three years for it to operationalise and now you are trying to rush it.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Not us people!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- You know that Standing Order 51 is not an issue, but the reason given that the previous administration or the previous Committee did not do its job, et cetera. Please let us not play politics with this kind of things. If it was a clear-cut submission that we are bringing it under Standing Order 51 – there were issues, all the Bills have issues, that is why they go for a review and if there is a change, it comes to Parliament. So, let us simplify things and stop blaming the previous government for something that they have not done and try to shadow things for your own failure - you failed to operationalise this particular Act for the past three years.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to support the Bill coming through Standing Order 51. Last time it came through Standing Order 51, it was the big Bill, it came with the intercountry adoption back in 2020 as alluded to by honourable Alvick Maharaj.

Why this particular procedure is legitimate in this case, as alluded to by the honourable Minister for Lands on the urgency that is there, and also after practical operation. Now we see some teething problems to fix that, that is why Standing Order 51 is in the Standing Orders not as decoration but as a passage to correct some of the gaps in the law that this particular Bill needs to fix immediately.

But again, every now and then, the Opposition is raising this issue of Standing Order 51. Back then in 2014 to 2018 and 2018 to 2022 when we used to sit in the Opposition, what happens is this. When the former Attorney-General of the previous government used to move Bills under Standing Order 51, they were all quiet, no one spoke up!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- At that time, we used to call them the *lave liga* squad! But good, they have come out. He is not around anymore, and they are able to speak their minds and express

themselves more.

That was the good thing about the change in Government and also the Parliament that we have now. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill and the procedure that the mover of the motion is bringing forth.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has now got a new *lave liga* squad!

(Laughter)

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- A bigger one!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A bigger one, Sir!

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, sometimes I sit here and wonder, what is being sought is not being fought. It is the process by which you bring it, and I think it is going to be something that you will hear all the time because we heard it all the time from you, so it is something that is going to happen in Parliament.

However, in a nutshell, Sir, it is a Bill that addresses an issue that needs to be addressed. I think that all lawyers will agree that it needs to be addressed. We cannot sit here, finger point and blame each other and say, “you took too long.” And you say, “no, we actually did it.” It does not make sense, Sir. We are actually being unreasonable to ourselves and to our parliamentary time.

What is more important and most important is the fact, and I am sure you will all understand this more than anyone else in this room, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it needs to be done, it needs to be addressed and we are here to address it, fine, we are bordering Standing Order 51, you are not going to go through any consultation exercise but the content of this is actually a good thing.

I think you will find support in this, honourable Minister, from this side of the House with respect to the Bill when it formally comes to the floor of this House.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to just make a contribution on the motion that is before the House. The question is whether the Bill is really urgent and the honourable Minister has clearly highlighted the urgency of this Bill. It is halting the work in the judiciary and of the Ministry in terms of the adoption, legal aid with whatever cases that comes with respect to adoption. This Bill is urgently needed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to come by way of Standing Orders 51, which the Standing Orders clearly allow that, I see that there is no problem with it. To the other side of the House, this is not new, we have done this before, and I also concur with honourable Vosarogo - 24 hours is not new to the other side of the House. We will come back tomorrow with a few amendments and the request for this Bill to come through Standing Order 51, as the honourable Minister stated is very important.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just for the record:

- (1) 4 Bills tabled under Standing Order 51 this year;
- (2) 16 Bills tabled (Budget Consequential Bills) under Standing Order 51;
- (3) 9 Bills referred to Standing Committees; and
- (4) 4 Bills - normal process.

Basically, what we are saying, we have been responsible about using Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I refer to 9th February, 2022, in this House, there was a debate on a Commission of Enquiry Amendment Bill under Standing Order 51 and I quote the honourable Gavoka:

“Here we are after 9pm, after a long day, we are given these Bills to be debated tomorrow for one hour. I do not have any problems with the debate of other Bills, but this one here, you will need lawyers to look into this. Who on this side of the House would understand the implications of what is here. This is a disgrace.”

On the same day, there were other Bills tabled under Standing Order 5, the -

- (a) Fiji National University (Amendment) Bill; and
- (b) Tobacco Control (Amendment) Bill.

However, if you look at the Adoption Bill, and as articulated by the honourable Minister for Lands, it is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I returned from New Zealand after the Fiji Day celebration, and this was one of the questions put to me. These were questions put to us as lawyers way back in 2020, 2021 and 2022, so there is an urgency to address this.

There is an urgent need to process the pending applications and provide permanent homes for children, particularly for our residents, our members of Fijian diaspora living abroad. The technical nature and amendments do not alter the substantive principles of the 2022 Act but enables its implementation. There has been extensive consultations already conducted by the Ministry of Women, Judiciary, Legal Aid Commission, Fiji Law Society, and Office of the Solicitor-General. This was held about three weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, which was chaired by my office, to address this particular problem.

The humanitarian imperative where each day of delay prolongs uncertainty for affected children and families. The Adoption (Amendment) Bill is not introducing a new policy, but rather it activates and operationalises the framework Parliament already approved in 2020. By passing this Bill this week, the Chief Justice will issue rules of court immediately after commencement. The relevant rules and regulations are in its draft form to be finalised soon.

The Ministry of Women and Department of Children to begin processing the backlog of cases. Families and children awaiting legal adoption will finally be united in accordance with the law and this is a child protection and welfare priority for government. It demonstrates Fiji's commitment to the rights and well-being of the children, and particularly for the Coalition Government. I fully support the use of Standing Order 51 to introduce this Bill.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for this opportunity. I do not know whether the honourable Attorney- General was listening to what honourable Koya had said. We support the Bill. There is no question about it. In fact, I have got a proposal right now and we do not need to divide the parts to every member on this side. In fact, our proposal is, Sir, if you want, we can go through it now and pass the Bill, because we have no objection. That is what we are saying. That is the proposal that we are putting across, Sir.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you to all honourable Members who have contributed. It is something that, as everyone has alluded, it is a court process that is being halted by some discrepancies. That is what we are trying to correct. I thank you for your support, to honourable

Opposition Members for making this happen, because it is really the life of 460 children in the balance right now. Once again, I thank you and I look forward to the passing of this tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER.- I saw the honourable Premila Kumar signalling that they are in support, and I should not go through the process, but I have my own procedure to follow. So bear with me. We will vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank honourable Members for today. That now brings us to the end of our sitting. I thank you all for your presence and contribution.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.34 p.m.

## ANNEXURE I

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**Reply to Written Question No. 240/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry (Ref. Page 2291)**


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**MINISTER FOR MULTI-ETHNIC AFFAIRS AND SUGAR INDUSTRY**  
**(Hon. C.J. Singh)**

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Response to Written Question No. 240/2025, asked by honourable I.S. Vanawalu, is as follows:

**Background**

The unfortunate fire incident at the Rarawai Mill caused a significant disruption to harvest and transportation operations in the Rarawai Mill Sectors, affecting cane cutters, lorry owners and co-operatives. The Ministry, together with Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) and the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC), have been working closely to ensure that the impact on growers and stakeholders is minimised through both, financial and non-financial interventions.

(a) (i) **Impact on Cane Cutters**

Prior to the incident, a total of 380 gangs were in operation with approximately 2,964 cane cutters engaged. Following the fire, 71 gangs were directly affected, resulting in 532 cutters leaving midway through the harvesting season. As of now, 355 gangs remain operational, comprising around 2,485 cutters, as some gangs have resumed operations following remedial arrangements.

Currently, approximately 18,000 tonnes of cane remain impacted due to the shortage of harvest labour. To mitigate this, the FSC and the Ministry have mobilised mechanical harvesters and labour from neighbouring sectors, including the Lautoka Mill area, to support harvesting continuity.

(ii) **Impact on Lorry Owners and Drivers**

Before the fire, 503 Lorries were engaged in cane transportation. Presently, 442 Lorries remain active, with around 60 Lorries temporarily out of operation due to poor roadworthiness and the extended haulage distance to Lautoka Mill.

Operational Lorries are currently operating at approximately 35 percent to 40 percent capacity, consistent with the reduced crushing requirements at the Lautoka Mill.

(iii) **Impact on Co-operatives**

Prior to the incident, 36 co-operatives were actively managing harvesting and transportation logistics. Of these, 30 co-operatives continue to operate daily, though at 35 percent to 40 percent capacity, ensuring continuity of operations, despite the constraints caused by the Mill outage.

(b) **Financial Assistance Provided**

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recognition of the additional costs incurred by affected farmers, the following financial measures have been implemented:

(i) Cane Transfer Allowance

A payment of \$15 per tonne has been approved to assist affected growers in transporting cane from the Rarawai Mill area to the Lautoka Mill.

(ii) Rail Growers' Conversion Allowance

Support has also been provided to rail growers converting to lorry transport in line with provisions of the Master Award. The additional transport costs from this conversion are being fully absorbed by FSC.

These interventions ensure that growers are not burdened by unexpected costs arising from circumstances beyond their control.

Non-Monetary Support

In addition to direct financial assistance, several non-monetary measures have been introduced to maintain harvesting momentum and minimise operational disruptions. These include -

- (i) deployment of mechanical harvesters and redistribution of cutters from unaffected sectors;
- (ii) reallocation of logistics and transport resources from Rarawai Mill to Lautoka;
- (iii) continuous coordination between FSC, the SCGC, contractors and co-operatives, to ensure efficient movement of cane and to minimise delays; and
- (iv) ongoing stakeholder engagement to address operational bottlenecks as they arise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the significant setback caused by the Rarawai Mill fire, the Government, FSC, and stakeholders have responded swiftly and collaboratively. Through a combination of targeted financial relief, strategic operational adjustments, and strong field coordination, the sugar industry in the Rarawai Sector is steadily recovering and maintaining supply continuity to the Lautoka Mill.

Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to ensuring that no grower is left behind and that the sector continues to recover strongly in preparation for the next crushing season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

## ANNEXURE II

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**Reply to Written Question No. 241/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management (Ref. Page 2291)**


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**MINISTER FOR RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT  
AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT (Hon. S.R. Ditoka)**

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Response to Written Question No. 241/2025 asked by honourable I.S. Vanawalu is as follows:

Background

The Rural and Outer Island Programme (ROI), established under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Risk Management in 2023, represents a cornerstone initiative of the Coalition Government to transform rural and maritime connectivity. Now, in its third consecutive year of implementation, the Programme has received budgetary allocations of \$2.5 million in the 2023-2024 financial year, and \$3 million each for 2024-2025 financial year and 2025-2026 financial year, respectively.

In alignment with the Government's rural transformation agenda, the ROI Programme was strategically launched to strengthen basic infrastructure and access for remote communities, especially during the critical period of rebuilding national capacity following the re-establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD).

With 41.29 percent of Fiji's population residing in rural areas, this Programme continues to play a catalytic role in bridging connectivity gaps across Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Kadavu, Ovalau, and the Lau Group. Improved road networks have expanded access to schools, health centres, markets and essential public services, thus lifting social mobility and reducing isolation among rural families, farmers and vulnerable groups.

(a) Projects Implemented (January 2023-June 2025)

From January 2023 to June 2025, a total of 101 projects have been successfully implemented under the ROI Programme of which:

- 68 percent focused on the construction of new community access roads;
- 15 percent supported the establishment of rural food processing units and facilities;
- 9 percent assisted agriculture and livestock farmers;
- 4 percent strengthened communities with timber resources under the Rural Housing Initiative through portable sawmills;
- 2 percent supported subsistence fisheries; and
- 2 percent facilitated pontoon bridge construction.

This diversified investment mix demonstrates the Ministry's strategic shift from short-term infrastructure delivery to integrated rural value-chain development, ensuring that road access directly links to productive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and small-scale processing.

The ROI Programme is also reinforcing the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF)<sup>4</sup> at operational level, encouraging provincial coordination, cross-sectoral partnerships and long-

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<sup>4</sup> Cabinet recently endorsed the review report of the IRDF 2009 that will form the foundation in the formulation of the National Rural Development Policy (NRDP).

term sustainability. New community access roads are now designed to interconnect provincial boundaries, enabling the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) to progressively absorb them into its national inventory for maintenance and upgrading.

Project	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total	Percentage (%)
Roads	21	32	16	69	68
Agriculture/Livestock	5	4	0	9	9
Food Processing Unit and Facility	11	1	3	15	15
Forestry	4	0	0	4	4
Fisheries	0	1	1	2	2
Jetties (Pontoon)	0	0	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>

(b) Projects Under Construction

As of October 2025, 20 projects are currently under active construction. Of these, 81 percent are road projects, with 41 percent progressing through Phase Two works, which cover gravelling, compacting, and formation to FRA's Road Works Standards and Specifications.

The Programme also includes two major pontoon bridge projects - the Nokonoko-Laucala Bailey and Yanuca Pontoon Bridges, currently in the engineering scoping phase. These are vital to improving maritime mobility for coastal and island communities in Rewa, Beqa and Yanuca, facilitating access to markets, education and health services on the mainland.

Recognising that poverty remains disproportionately higher in rural areas, at 40 percent in the Eastern Division, according to the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the Ministry has prioritised targeted infrastructure and enterprise projects that can generate inclusive and lasting impact. To this end, three new processing and value-adding facilities are being established in the Eastern Division - a cassava cooling facility and *yaqona* processing centre in Gau; and a fish cooling and processing facility in Lakeba, Lau.

In the current financial year, the ROI Programme is further repositioned to establish strategic manufacturing and logistics hubs in the Lomaiviti and Lau Groups. These hubs will serve as rural transformation anchors, enhancing inter-island trade, strengthening local supply chains, and promoting integrated island economies.

Project	2025-2026
Roads	16
Agriculture/Livestock	0
Food Processing Unit and Facility	3
Forestry	0
Fisheries	1
Jetties (Pontoon)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

Conclusion

The ROI Programme reflects Government's strategic intent to build a connected, inclusive and resilient rural Fiji. Its forward-looking design links physical infrastructure with economic empowerment, enabling communities to thrive within their natural environments.

Going forward, the Ministry will deepen coordination through the revised IRDF, mobilising partnerships across Government agencies, development partners and local communities. By aligning financial, technical and institutional resources, the Programme will continue to transform rural and maritime livelihoods, ensuring that no community is left behind in Fiji's path to sustainable and equitable development.

## ANNEXURE III

**Reply to Written Question No. 242/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education  
(Ref. Page 2292)**



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

Response to Written Question No. 242/2025, asked by honourable H. Chand, is as follows:

Information and Data on Students who Assaulted Teachers

Year	No. of Cases	No. of Assault on Teachers	Nature of the Offence
2025	3	1	A parent was reported to Police when he got to a school in Lautoka and assaulted a teacher on 23rd July, 2025
		1	Student assaulted the teacher at the carpark of a school that was once used as a Technical College in Nausori.
		1	Student punched a teacher in the classroom at a school in Navua in February 2025.
2024	3	1	Student sexually exposing himself to the teacher at a school in Northern Tailevu on 15th November, 2024.
		1	Passing verbal abusive and vulgar remarks to the teacher at a school in Navua on 21st November, 2024.
		1	Physically assaulted a teacher due to alleging the student on smell of suki at a school in Lautoka on 28th October, 2024.
2023	1	1	Student physically assaulted the teacher during Industrial Arts class at a school in Ra on 1st August, 2023.