

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 4TH NOVEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 4TH NOVEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.36 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable S.S. Kirpal and 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 Monday, 3rd October 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

Honourable Members, I welcome you back to today's sitting, as we unite in pursuit of our nation's progress. I also extend a warm welcome to those joining us in the public gallery and to everyone watching the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for staying connected and engaged.

HE Peter Roberts - Australian High Commissioner

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the Australian High Commissioner, His Excellency Peter Roberts. Welcome to Parliament, Your Excellency, and thank you for joining us this morning.

Year 1-Year 5 Students - Genesis Learning Centre Primary School

I am also pleased, honourable Members, to join me in welcoming the Year 1 to Year 5 students from Genesis Learning Centre Primary School at Nasinu, who are accompanied by their teachers. We welcome you all to Parliament this morning and we hope that you will enjoy your Parliament and the work it does.

House Committee Membership

Honourable Members, please, be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 126(1)(d), honourable Alvick Maharaj has been appointed to replace honourable Ketan Lal as a Member of the House Committee.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation;
- (2) Minister for Health and Medical Services;
- (3) Minister for Fisheries and Forests;
- (4) Minister for Youth and Sports; and
- (5) Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport.

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.

Safety Risks in Aviation – Understanding and Mitigating Bird Strikes

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and our citizenry; I rise today to address an important aviation safety concern that affects both - global and local operations, wildlife hazards, with a specific focus on bird strikes. Wildlife hazards, particularly bird strikes, present significant risks to flight safety, aircraft integrity and operational efficiency. Managing these risks is critical to ensuring the continued safety of our skies and passengers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji faces a global issue of bird strikes, with significant risks to local wildlife. In 2024, Fiji Airports Limited reported 41 bird strikes at Nadi International Airport, 32 involving foreign species and the rest involving local birds such as owls, mynah birds and flying foxes. These bird strikes have risen significantly, from 24 in 2022 to 33 in 2023, and 41 in 2024. We ask the question, what are bird strikes and why do they matter?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, bird strikes occur when birds collide with aircrafts, commonly during critical phases of flight, such as take-off and landing. These incidents range in severity from minor damage to catastrophic accidents. A notable instance of this occurred in December 2024 when Jeju Air Flight 2216 suffered dual engine failure after a bird strike in South Korea. The aircraft subsequently struck a concrete structure during a belly landing, resulting in 179 fatalities. The tragic event highlights the severe dangers posed by bird strikes worldwide.

Closer to home, Fiji Airways recently faced a similar challenge on 9th October, 2025, when Fiji Airways Flight FJ450, a Boeing 737-800 registered DQ-FJN, departing Christchurch for Nadi, encountered a flock of pigeons during take-off.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to commend and extend my sincere gratitude to the pilots of the Fiji Airways Flight involved in the recent bird strike in Christchurch, whose professionalism, composure and skilled handling of the situation ensured the safe landing of the aircraft and the safety of all passengers and crew on board. Following the incident, a thorough inspection revealed damage to the aircraft's nose, fuselage, wings and engines. Six dead pigeons were recovered from the runway.

This incident was formally reported by Fiji Airways, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji and the New Zealand Civil Aviation Authority, in line with international regulations under the

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 13. Fiji Airways' Flight Safety Team has launched an internal investigation to derive lessons and strengthen future mitigation measures.

On the financial and operational impacts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, bird strikes carry considerable financial burdens. In 2024, Fiji Airways grounded four Boeing 737 aircrafts due to bird strikes with annual costs estimated at FJD19.2 million. A single turbine blade damage incident in January 2025 incurred costs of FJD4.8 million. These figures reflect the tangible impact on airline operations, maintenance budgets, and passenger services. We ask the question, why are birds attracted to airports?

Birds, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are drawn to airport environments primarily to the availability of food, water and shelter. Key attractants include open drains and standing water sources, waste disposal sites and rubbish dumps, and fruit trees and crops near airport boundaries. These factors create habitats where birds congregate, increasing the likelihood of bird strikes during aircraft operations.

What needs to be done? Mr. Speaker, Sir, effectively, managing bird strike risks requires reducing bird attractants near airports by working with local authorities to control land use, waste, and water sources. Regular monitoring of bird activity helps identify high-risk species and periods, with data shared between airlines and airport authorities to alert pilots.

Additionally, training pilots and ground staff to recognise and respond to risks is essential. The use of technology such as bird detection radars and wildlife deterrent devices further improve real-time hazard management and safety.

On the ground management efforts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the risks posed by bird strikes, Fiji Airports and Fiji Airways have committed to robust and coordinated wildlife hazard management programmes. Fiji Airports has developed a comprehensive Wildlife Management Plan that incorporates best practices and international standards and established a Wildlife Committee to oversee monitoring and mitigation activities at Nadi and Nausori Airports, as well as other airports.

Personnel, including Wildlife Coordinators, Airside Safety Officers and Airport Environment Officers are tasked with day-to-day hazard management. Key initiatives by Fiji Airports include:

- mapping and mitigating bird attractants within a five-kilometre radius of airports in collaboration with local authorities;
- launching environmental sustainability campaigns to raise awareness; and
- advocating for stronger land-use regulations around airports.

To enhance flight safety, a visual guide has been developed and distributed to flight crews, detailing common bird species found around Nadi Airport, their behavioural traits and associated flight risks. Mitigation methods include:

- routine dispersal runs for ATR-sized aircraft using vehicle horns and sirens;
- engaging wildlife experts for audits and training;
- using acoustic sonic devices on vehicles;
- ongoing monitoring of bird activities and notifications; and
- culling high-risk birds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airways supports these efforts by sharing real-time bird strike data, conducting DNA analysis of bird remains to identify high-risk species, and enhancing pilot awareness through training and operational guidelines, including rerouting flights during peak bird

migration periods. Together, these proactive measures aim to reduce bird strikes, risks, and improve aviation safety.

On the national framework, Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising the need for a national approach, Cabinet endorsed the establishment of the National Wildlife Hazard Management Committee for Aviation on 14th August, 2025. The Committee facilitates cross-sector collaboration among government agencies, aviation authorities, environmental bodies and local communities.

Its mandate includes promoting awareness, coordinating mitigation efforts, supporting wildlife hazard programmes at airports through the Airport Committee, and ensuring Fiji's compliance with ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices. The Committee also oversees the mandatory reporting of wildlife strikes to ICAO's International Bird Strike Information System, strengthening Fiji's role in the global aviation safety network.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, bird strikes are a growing global challenge with potentially devastating consequences. The recent Jeju Air tragedy and Fiji Airways' own incident remind us of the constant vigilance required to safeguard our skies. Through the dedicated efforts of Fiji airports, Fiji Airways and the newly formed National Wildlife Hazard Management Committee, we are advancing our capacity to manage and mitigate these risks effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by working collaboratively, investing in technology, raising awareness and enforcing sound policies, Fiji is committed to protecting aviation safety, our passengers, and our national reputation as a safe hub in the Asia-Pacific region.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. As you had rightfully pointed out, Sir, this is a very intriguing area, but it is not something that should be taken lightly because in terms of wildlife hazards, et cetera, in aviation, it is of critical importance that everyone should know why certain rules and regulations exist specifically with respect to airport and airport areas around Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, bird strikes, as we all know, can be common. There is certain level of tolerance in the amount that can happen throughout the year. I think for every million odd flight, there is about 400 plus that is at an acceptable level. However, be that as it may, Sir, it is an extreme risk to aircraft safety. It can cause aircraft structural damage to the fuselage, wings and engines, et cetera, so those particular areas are of critical importance so that everyone should know.

I do recall, Mr. Speaker, that quite a few people who live in and around the surrounding area around CAAF, just out of protection, talk about the animals that they actually keep, and it is not just about bird safety. It is also about those ground strikes that may occur with mammals that are actually on the ground, and I am talking about dogs, et cetera. That is why a rule exists around CAAF that you cannot keep pets.

Sometimes, people flaunted, but I know for a fact that CAAF authorities look down on it very, very seriously if your dog actually goes under the fence and into the area. They will shoot it, it is as simple as that. They will not ask questions because when it comes to safety, it cannot be compromised. I have a friend who lost a pet because of that but these are the rules that people must remember that need to be and must always be obeyed.

Mr. Speaker, I know that CAAF has done a tremendous job. There is a manual that has been

produced with respect to aviation safety and wildlife hazards. It is actually a management model that they have which is extremely helpful to all those who live in the surrounding area and all those pilots, et cetera, that do that.

However, one of the most important things that we must remember, Mr. Speaker, is that with the changing environment around the world in terms of airports and a lot of development that is actually going on, when we do these things, we and all those people who want to develop in and around airport areas must be mindful that there will be restrictions. They must adhere to it. You cannot flaunt it or flout it, and CAAF will come down very hard on those that do because birds especially, as rightfully pointed out by the honourable Minister, are attracted to waste areas and attracted to fruit trees. You may think that it is alright to plant a fruit tree within a particular surrounding area of the airport and if we are looking at Nadi itself, that is quite a substantial area that you are looking at, that may affect our planes. We want to be ensuring that we do not come within those 1 million flights and 540, we want to keep it at zero.

In terms of the development, I know there is a strong movement going on with respect to new developing part of the airport and that will include all of this in terms of wildlife hazards and how they actually take care of it. Waste is something that we look at and we think, “Oh, it's okay too”, but that waste actually attracts birds, et cetera, and all different sorts of wildlife which will affect aviation safety.

Mr. Speaker, when we think about these things, we must not always think that, “Alright, it is just the small birds that actually will affect”. No, it could be even insects, little insects that can affect an aircraft and its safety, and you may lose control. The risk to aviation is actually huge if you lose control, as pointed out by the honourable Minister, and there is an economic cost to all of these. You need to understand that.

Those are words of warning to all of those who live in and around the airport areas. If you want to build, if you are already there, please, be mindful that it is of critical importance that you remember this, because there are planes that are flying in and out and Fiji is becoming a fantastic destination where more and more bigger aircrafts are flying in.

The other thing also is that we have silent aircraft now. Sometimes, the noise scares the birds away but now, the aircrafts are so silent that even that, it is actually dangerous, from one's perspective. The aircraft is silent, the birds do not even realise it, so we need to keep them out of that particular area.

Just in short, I support the honourable Minister in his Statement, and with respect to that, but just a word of warning to the general public, please, always ensure that you are compliant with CAAF and the airport regulations when it comes to aviation safety.

Elimination of Trachoma, Measles and Rubella in Fiji

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public joining in from the gallery and from their places of work and their homes; I rise to deliver this Ministerial Statement in this august House, on the achievement of three historic health milestones for our nation. In the months of September and October of 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially recognised Fiji as having eliminated Measles, Rubella and Trachoma as public health problems.

It is unprecedented, indeed, that Fiji has achieved the recognition of WHO through the declaration of the elimination of three public health diseases, which are testament to decades of sustained commitment by our Ministry, our communities, our partners and our hardworking healthcare workers over the years, who have demonstrated the passion, strength, resilience and leadership of Fiji's health system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last WHO disease elimination declaration for Fiji was for poliomyelitis or polio for short, certified as eliminated, together with the rest of the Western Pacific region in the year 2000. The last case of polio case was recorded in Fiji in 1962. Now, 25 years later, Fiji celebrates the elimination of three major infectious diseases - Measles, Rubella and Trachoma, reaffirming our nation's commitment to a future, free of preventable diseases and aligned with the region's Healthy Islands Vision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Measles is a highly contagious airborne infection caused by the Measles virus. It can lead to life-threatening complications, like brain inflammation and pneumonia, which can lead to death. Historically, Measles was one of Fiji's most serious diseases, responsible for repeated outbreaks throughout the 20th century and, indeed, the infamous 1875 outbreak killed approximately a quarter of the entire Fijian population at the time.

The introduction of Measles vaccine into the childhood immunization schedule in the 1980s, major improvements in vaccination coverage over the decades, and enhanced medical services, have together significantly reduced the number of cases and deaths caused by Measles.

The most recent outbreak occurred between November 2019 and April 2020, with 31 confirmed cases nationally and no deaths, with the outbreak centred in the Serua/Namosi Health Subdivision. The outbreak was linked to other outbreaks in the Pacific region, including New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa, which recorded close to 6,000 cases and 83 deaths.

The outbreak response in Fiji included the –

- rapid case notification through our surveillance and laboratory systems;
- rapid response to cases, including isolation and quarantine of contacts; and
- mass vaccination of over 300,000 people in the age group of 6 months to 5 years old and 19 years old to 39 years old, to close our existing immunity gap.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last confirmed cases of Measles in Fiji was reported on 19th March, 2020, and no endemic transmission has since occurred. To date, all suspected Measles cases detected through our surveillance systems are investigated by the Ministry, through our divisional teams and the Fiji Centre of Disease Control (CDC), with confirmatory testing at Fiji's CDC National Public Health Laboratory, with support from the Victorian Infectious Disease Reference Laboratory at the Peter Doherty Institute in Melbourne, Australia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, WHO also considers Measles as an equity marker. When cases rise, it signals that vulnerable population group have missed out on essential health services such as vaccination. I, therefore, wish to thank all our hardworking immunisation nurses, immunisation teams and partners over the years who have worked so hard and collaborated to maintain a high level of Measles vaccination in Fiji.

On Rubella, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Rubella is also a contagious disease caused by the Rubella virus that is transmitted via air droplets through coughing and sneezing. It is also sometimes referred to by its older term as the German Measles. While the infection may cause mild or no symptoms in most people, it can cause serious birth defects in unborn babies, which is called the Congenital

Rubella Syndrome.

In Fiji, transmission of Rubella has been interrupted since 2013, with the last confirmed case recorded in 2016. Through high vaccination coverage and strengthened surveillance, Rubella circulation has been eliminated for nearly a decade, thereby, preventing Congenital Rubella Syndrome in newborns. We are, again, grateful for the vaccination effort employed by the Ministry nationwide that has ensured the elimination of this health threat.

On Measles and Rubella elimination verification process, Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the WHO, the elimination of Measles or Rubella is achieved where there is no endemic virus transmission for, at least, 12 consecutive months in the presence of a high-quality surveillance system that is capable of detecting and confirming any suspected cases.

Measles and Rubella elimination was achieved through the comprehensive verification process used by WHO for all countries worldwide. Fiji's elimination verification was more complicated as we were collectively verified for elimination as a sub-region with 20 other Pacific Island Countries.

The 21 countries, including Fiji, submitted our national comprehensive verification dossier, demonstrating interruption of endemic transmission, with evidence from five core lines of verification as follows:

- (1) Epidemiological evidence that there has been no endemic transmission of Measles or Rubella virus for 12 or more months.
- (2) Surveillance report that there were two or more discarded non-measle cases per 100,000 population per year through timely investigation and lab confirmation.
- (3) The presence of WHO-accredited national laboratory that can perform reliable, timely PCR and serological testing, and participating in regional proficiency testing.
- (4) The maintenance of population immunity of 95 percent coverage or more for both MCV1 and MCV2 (Measles-containing vaccine) and Rubella-containing vaccine sustained over several years.
- (5) The demonstration of sustainable Outbreak Preparedness and Response status that has the capacity to detect and respond to any importation with updated outbreak response plans and strengthen cold chain systems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, facilitating this verification process, Fiji has a governance mechanism through Vaccine Preventable Disease (VPD) Committee that is co-chaired by Family Health and Health Protection Division with membership from our local health experts and the Paediatric Clinical Services Network.

The VPD Committee's role is to oversee policy, documentation and evidence gathering, review surveillance and immunisation data, and reports through regional and global reporting mechanisms.

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of experts from the WHO, UNICEF, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), the National Centre for Immunization Research in Australia and individual experts in the field.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated last week by the Regional Director for WHO in the Western Pacific Region, Dr. Saia Piukala, the verified elimination of Measles and Rubella in Fiji is not the end but the beginning of more work that is required to ensure that we maintain the elimination status.

Measles outbreaks continue to occur throughout the world. Currently, our regional neighbours in New Zealand and Australia are reporting new cases linked to international travel, and we may record an old case here and there. However, we must continue to work hard to eliminate endemic transmission through maintaining:

- (1) high levels of vaccination coverage in the Childhood Immunization Programme;
- (2) surveillance for early detection of cases;
- (3) our Measles laboratory testing capability; and
- (4) our ability for rapid redeployment for an effective outbreak response.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Trachoma, it is a bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *chlamydia trachomatis*, and is spread through contact with the eyes, eyelids, nose or throat secretions of infected people. Repeated infections lead to scarring and blindness, if untreated.

Trachoma was once a leading cause of blindness in Fiji and widespread in the 1950s, with prevalence exceeding 20 percent among children in some areas. In 2007, a rapid assessment in high-risk Fijian communities revealed active Trachoma rate averaging as high as 22 percent in children aged one year to nine years.

Fiji then adopted the Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial Cleanliness and Environmental (SAFE) improvement. Population-based survey in 2012 showed that the prevalence of Trachomatous inflammation remained above 5 percent threshold, with Trachomatous trichiasis in adults recorded at 8.7 percent.

Today, following sustained national action, the prevalence of active Trachoma has fallen below 1 percent, with no cases of blinding Trachoma recorded since 2015.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's journey towards Trachoma elimination began over a decade ago. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services, through the Fiji CDC, the Health Divisions, the Pacific Eye Institute, Fred Hollows Foundation and partners, undertook a nationwide programme of surveillance, clinical management and health promotion, guided by the WHO SAFE Strategy.

This achievement is due to long-term investment in water, sanitation and hygiene, school-based education and community empowerment, ensuring that facial cleanliness and hygiene are now everyday habits across Fiji. These includes:

- (1) ongoing health education campaigns promoting immunisation, hygiene, and early health-seeking behaviour;
- (2) programmes like "Wash, Brush and Splash" encouraged daily hygiene in schools and households; and
- (3) collaboration with faith leaders, teachers and local authorities ensured widespread community participation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through these combined measures, the prevalence of active Trachoma in Fiji communities have fallen to below 1 percent, meeting WHO's elimination criteria.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, elimination validation for Trachoma was a rigorous evidence-based process established by the WHO and used by all countries that have been validated as eliminating Trachoma. Fiji submitted its Trachoma Elimination Dossier to WHO in June 2025, supported by data collected through surveys from 2019 to 2024. Independent verification was undertaken by WHO experts in collaboration with partners, such as the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, The Fred Hollows Foundation, and Project Heaven.

Following review and peer evaluation, the WHO conferred Fiji's elimination status in October 2025, confirming that all elimination thresholds had been met. Fiji has become only the 26th country in the world to eliminate Trachoma as a public health problem.

We extend our gratitude to all healthcare workers, eye specialists and partners, who have worked tirelessly over the years to save our people from preventable cause of blindness in our population.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the elimination of Measles, Rubella and Trachoma as public health issues is important because it delivers profound benefits to Fiji.

- (1) Health Benefits
Prevention of complications of these diseases including blindness, deafness, pneumonia, encephalitis and congenital malformations, alleviates the human suffering and the debilitating long-term human and social costs that includes permanent disabilities and death.
- (2) Economic Gains
Avoidance of disease-related healthcare costs that is associated with mounting coordinated outbreak response actions, as well as the workforce productivity costs through loss of employment days and reduced productivity from sickness and the necessary public health response actions.
- (3) Social Impact
Enhanced educational outcomes promoting social and gender equity. For example, Trachoma has been reported to disproportionately affect women and children.
- (4) Global Standing
Promotes and reinforces Fiji's reputation as a regional leader in the public health, fulfilling our commitments under the International Health Regulations (IHR) and advancing our Universal Health Coverage (UHC) agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the achievements reaffirm the success of Fiji's Primary Health Care (PHC) approach, emphasising prevention, health promotion and community participation.

The integration of immunisation, disease surveillance, WASH programmes, and eye health within PHC demonstrates that investment in preventative health infrastructure and community engagement yields sustainable results. The collaboration between Health, Education and Water Authorities underlines a whole-of-society approach to health security and wellbeing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, maintaining elimination status requires continued vigilance and investment. The Ministry will:

- (1) continue the annual surveillance reviews and data audits;
- (2) conduct periodic refresher training for health staff, including surveillance officers and clinicians;
- (3) maintain childhood immunisation coverage and ensure equitable access for all communities;
- (4) maintain disease surveillance, laboratory and outbreak response capacity;
- (5) strengthen regional collaboration through WHO and SPC; and
- (6) Fiji will also continue to share its expertise with other Pacific Island Countries working toward similar elimination goals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, these recognitions by the World Health Organisation mark a proud moment in Fiji's health history. They belong to every healthcare worker, community nurse, teacher and partner organisation that has worked tirelessly to protect the sight, health and lives of every Fijian.

I extend Fiji's sincere appreciation to the WHO, The Fred Hollows Foundation, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT), Burnet Institute, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Project Haven, UNICEF, and the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) at the Peter Doherty Institute, for their partnership and support.

Fiji's elimination of Measles, Rubella and Trachoma demonstrates that with sustained commitment, scientific excellence, community solidarity and collective action, public health victories are not only possible, but they are also lasting.

Before I take my seat, I would also like to thank a visiting Chinese Medical Team that is currently within the country, and they are doing eye surgeries starting from tomorrow. We continuously strengthen the Government of China and through the Medical Team from the Guangdong Province and I urge honourable Members and the general public to, please, make use of this opportunity that is before us.

With those few words, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as honourable Opposition Members, we would like to join the Government in congratulating the tireless effort of our healthcare workers, the honourable Minister for Health, the honourable Assistant Minister for Health, the communities, and our international partners for achieving the WHO validation for elimination of Trachoma, Measles and Rubella as public health problem. This is a significant milestone, especially in the elimination of Trachoma, the world's leading infectious cause of blindness, which speaks volume about the commitment to the health equity and the testament to the foundation laid by the previous public health initiatives, including vaccination campaign.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot let the shine of this achievement blind us to the deteriorating state of our national healthcare infrastructure. While the honourable Minister celebrates disease elimination, our everyday citizens are suffering from the collapse of the very system meant to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the narrative that the Fiji health system is improving is contradicting to the reality on the ground. Infrastructure decay reports highlight tumble-down clinics with flailing tiles and crumbling doctors' quarters. We hear the frontline workers crying over the condition they must work in while saving our people. How can Government claim victory when the basic physical environment for delivering care is falling apart?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on human resource management, we face the critical exodus of medical professionals, exacerbated by poor planning. The fact that newly graduated nurses wait up to six months for employment while established staff are overworked is not just poor management, it is a betrayal for our young professionals and a direct threat to women's health, given the critically low number of midwives available for our childbearing population.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government speaks of a larger budget, but the Opposition sees unspent

funds in crucial areas. Millions allocated for the staff quarters for vital hospital upgrades, like Labasa Hospital, remain unspent. This is not just insufficiency; it suggests a failure in execution and strategy to deliver on promises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has taken this Government three years just to fix the electricity supply, to switch on the CT Scan machine that was brought in by the previous Government three years ago. No amount of explanation can justify the delay at Labasa Hospital.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order, honourable Tuisawau.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 61. When speaking, Members must confine their observations to the subject under consideration. The subject is Measles and Trachoma. When you discuss or explain Measles and Trachoma, does it include the tiles in the hospital?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Yes!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Of course not! I mean, these are two totally separate subjects - disease and infrastructure. Do you understand the difference between germs and a building? They are two different subjects. Otherwise, we will jump all over the place.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I rule on your Point of Order, let me just hear you, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Point of Order, with your permission, the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament quoted Standing Order 61. Standing Order 61 talks about not allowing to talk on anything for which a judicial decision is pending. There is no judicial decision we are talking about here.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- I think it is Standing Order 60(1), rather than 61.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order! I am making a ruling here, please, bear with me.

Honourable Tuisawau had made a Point of Order and relied on Standing Order 60(1). Yes, you obviously had misinterpreted Standing Order 61.

In any case, it is quite correct that a member must confine his observations to the issues that had been raised in the Ministerial Statement. He cannot then go and talk generally about healthcare in Fiji. You know what I mean?

So, if you will, I will accept the Point of Order that has been raised and, please, confine yourself to the issues that had been raised by him in terms of the efforts of the administration, whether

it was the one before or now, in eliminating those various diseases that he had mentioned. Please, proceed, honourable Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.— Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we talk about disease, we talk about patients. When a person is suffering from a disease, they end up in hospitals. When patients end up in hospital, they need a conducive environment in terms of HR and infrastructure for their disease to be treated, whether it is mumps, Rubella, Measles, Trachoma, HIV, NCD, or whatever it is. We need to provide a conducive environment for our patients.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that note, when these patients travel all the way from their homes with the diseases they may have, we need to provide them with a conducive environment. I will give you an example.

When patients come to Punjas Health Centre at around 6.00 am to be seen by the doctors, all health centres have security guards, and they wait until 8.00 a.m. to open the gate. Patients are waiting outside the gate to get the treatment.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the healthcare system does not operate in isolation. So, let me go onto the public health nurses who are the ones who provide this particular service. They have been overworked, going out to the areas not in a vehicle but taking a walk from house to house, travelling a massive landscape allocated to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they should be well compensated in terms of their salary increase and a conducive environment, not made to walk from house to house.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, eliminating the disease through a focused campaign is commendable but maintaining a functioning, modern and accessible healthcare system for all citizens, close to 300,000 women for every child and for every pensioner requires sustained, competent governance of infrastructure and staffing. We must demand more in symbolic victories.

We demand that the honourable Minister provide us with a concrete timebound plan, not only to maintain our elimination status, but more urgently to rebuild the crumbling foundations of our hospitals and health centres, and to implement a robust retention strategy of our valuable nurses and doctors. The people of Fiji deserve a healthcare system that works from the remote village clinic to the central hospital ward. Celebration is earned and accountability is mandatory, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank honourable Maharaj for the response given by the Opposition side. It is quite an attractive proposition when you have a medical background and the issues mentioned, you will get out of it, so thank you for that intervention.

Honourable Members, we will suspend our proceedings for our morning break and Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.24 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

Interim Pathway for the Transfer and Trading of Fiji's Emission Reduction Units

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the House this morning on the alternative pathway that will be employed as an interim measure for the transfer and trading of the emission reduction units under the current Carbon Trade Agreement whilst Part 10 of the Climate Change Act 2021 is yet to come into force.

Mr. Speaker, the Fiji Government is currently engaged in a Carbon Trade Agreement with the Carbon Fund of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility through its trustees the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The Carbon Trade Agreement known as the Emission Reduction Programme Agreement was signed by the Fiji Government in 2021. This Carbon Trade Agreement requires the Fiji Government to transfer 2.5 million emission reduction units to the Carbon Fund Facility. In return, the Carbon Fund will make payments amounting to US\$12.5 million which is equivalent to F\$28.4 million at the current exchange rate as results-based payment.

Mr. Speaker, this basically implies that the Fiji Government will only be paid for the volume of emission reduction units transferred under the Agreement and this is 2.5 million emission reduction units.

In my previous address in this august House, I had reported that the first assessment under the Agreement has been audited, and the report records a total of 922,828 emission reduction units that potentially can be transferred, which is expected to generate US\$4.6 million, an equivalent to F\$10.48 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Carbon Trade Agreement will end on 31st December, 2025. Part 10 of the Climate Change Act 2021 was to provide the legal framework and pathway for the transfer and trade of the emission reduction units. However, this aspect of the Climate Change Act 2021 has yet to come into force.

Mr. Speaker, to address this present deficiency, the Ministry of Forestry has worked jointly with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, *iTaukei* Land Trust Board, Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, Office of the Registrar of Titles and with the legal guidance of the Office of the Solicitor-General to devise an alternative pathway for the transfer of the emission reduction units to the Carbon Fund as an interim measure.

Mr. Speaker, the alternative pathway employs two key instruments that are recognised in Fiji's existing legal framework that governs land and forest, the protection of rights of the resource owners and transfer of rights, and most importantly ensures that Fiji's sovereignty remains protected and uncompromised and these are:

- (1) Land Lease Agreement which is issued for development purposes under the following legal frameworks. For native land, the relevant laws are the *iTaukei* Land Trust Act 1940, *iTaukei* Land Trust Leases and Licenses Regulations 1984 and the *iTaukei* Land Act 1905. For State land, the relevant law is the State Lands Act 1945. For freehold or privately owned land, the relevant law is the Land Transfer Act 1971.

- (2) Deed of Assignment which provides the pathway for the leaseholder to transfer the rights to the emission reduction units, to the Fiji Government, to then directly transfer and trade with the buyer, that is, the Carbon Fund.

Mr. Speaker, the assignment will be employed in two forms and is dependent on whether a piece of land is leased or vacant, that is, for land under an existing lease, a variation to the current terms and conditions of the lease agreement is mandatory. This variation will incorporate conditions that allow the leaseholder to participate in the emission reduction programme, and secondly, incorporate a condition for the transfer of the rights to the emission reduction units to the Fiji Government.

Mr. Speaker, a Deed of Assignment that relates to the variation of the lease terms and conditions is then registered as an accompanying document with the Office of the Registrar of Titles. For vacant land that will be issued new leases, this is straightforward with both conditions, that is, to participate in the emission reduction programme and the assignment of the rights to the emission reduction units to the Fiji Government. These are incorporated as a condition of the initial lease agreement and registered with the Office of the Registrar of Titles.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to make it clear in this august House, that all processes of community engagement and consultation, and customary protocols regarding acquiring the consent of the landowners will be followed prior to the documentation process that I have just explained. The alternative pathway now allows the Fiji Government to begin to execute the terms and conditions of the Carbon Trade Agreement, and Fiji is expected to record its first transfer and trading of the emission reduction units before the end of this calendar year.

Mr. Speaker, the Carbon Fund is empathetic to Fiji's challenges and is willing to consider an extension to the term of the Carbon Trade Agreement, but this decision will only be made when Fiji displays a consolidated effort in the form of the transfer and trading of the emission reduction units.

Mr. Speaker, the alternative pathway allows existing leaseholders to participate in the emission reduction programme by way of variation in their respective lease terms and conditions. The alternative pathway ensures that the ownership and rights of the landowner are protected, and that an equitable share of the carbon payment is paid to the landowning unit, in addition to the mandatory land rentals payable each year. The alternative pathway is an interim measure that will be followed, to allow the Fiji Government to begin executing its part under the current Carbon Trade Agreement, and it is envisaged that the transition to adopt a legal framework under Part 10 of the Climate Change Act 2021 will be seamless with less complication.

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

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for her Statement this morning. I understand that the two issues that she has delivered are, firstly, was an interim pathway for transfer of Fiji's emission reduction as Part 10 to the Climate Change Act 2021. And secondly, Fiji to execute an agreement to protect landowners' rights, consent and secure its first payment before the 2025 deadline.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) was of the development strategy developed for 2018 to 2050, was developed under the guidance of the Ministry of Economy with support from the Global Green Growth Institute. The overall aim of LEDS is to enhance Fiji's ability to plan for decarbonisation of its economy in the long term, by providing a framework and a pathway which can be revised and enhanced under Fiji's Nationally Determined

Contribution (NDC), and this will reduce greenhouse emissions to 2030 and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Climate Change Act 2021 was geared towards adaptation, disaster risk management, mitigation, loss and damage. The Act was, as alluded to by the honourable Minister, approved on 23rd September, 2021 under Article 6 which recognises and declares that Fiji and the earth are facing a climate emergency. The document establishes the National Coordinating Committee, the National Adaptation Steering Committee and the Fiji Adaptation Registry.

The Fijian Taskforce on the Relocation and Displacement (FTRD) of communities on the impact of climate change, National Ocean Policy may establish a private sector advisory committee. It further aims to provide relocation at risk communities and safeguard their rights, sets a net zero emissions to target, sets legal framework to enable carbon sequestration, carbon stocks, emissions reduction projects.

Fourthly, it charges relevant agencies to reduction risk assessments and to decide on new buildings and infrastructure based on resilience estimates.

Lastly, it makes provision for the implementation of sustenance and sustainable financing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to comment on the honourable Minister's initiative to secure a payment before the 2025 deadline. While I congratulate the Minister's effort to execute this Agreement to protect the landowners' rights and secure its first payment, I believe that both the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry must be an important component in the deliberation and discussions during the COP meetings that is held annually.

This will allow these three Ministries to be able to update their Ministry and the commitments that they have made to the national initiatives. The framework and pathway where it can be revised and enhanced basically depend on the various ministries and agencies that are bounded to create these discussions and make sure their contributions towards the national and global efforts is maintained. Without the interactions of these important natural resources-based ministries and agencies, it will be difficult to gauge.

I understand that the honourable Minister is now trying to create an activity that will give input to these discussions and make an important effort before the timeline, which is, December 2025. I thank and appreciate the honourable Minister's effort, but again, these three natural resource-based Ministries must be involved in further discussions going into the future.

Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival: Empowering Youth, Reviving Sports and Building Communities

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and my fellow citizens; *ni sa bula vinaka* and warm greetings to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise with great pride and optimism to share a remarkable story of transformation - a story that began with a spark of hope on the island of Kadavu and has now ignited a spirit of unity, pride and achievement across Fiji.

Before I do that, allow me to first congratulate both teams that played in the final of the Skipper Cup last Saturday - Naitasiri Highlanders for successfully defending the INNK Farebrother Sullivan Trophy this season, and to congratulate Malolo Rugby team for being crowned the Skipper Cup 2025 champion.

In December 2023, the Ministry of Youth and Sports implemented the first ever *Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival*, which was officiated by the honourable Prime Minister. It was an event that was not just a gathering of young people but a movement that awakened a sleeping giant in both youth and sports development. What began as a simple festival of dreams has today become a powerful example of what happens when the Government, community and youths come together with one purpose - to rise up and rebuild and rise up Kadavu certainly has.

Mr. Speaker, the *Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival* was conceived under the Ministry's broader vision of empowering young people through engagement, qualification, knowledge, skills and resource development - in alignment with the Fiji Government's 5-Year and 20-Years National Development Plans and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Kadavu, despite being Fiji's third largest island continues to face challenges - limited training opportunities, lack of employment pathways and the rise of illicit substance cultivation. The Ministry saw in these challenges a unique opportunity to transform them into platforms of empowerment through sports, agriculture and entrepreneurship. Thus, the *Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival*, meaning "Rise Kadavu" was born - a festival designed to reignite the spirit of hope, pride and purpose among Kadavu's youth.

Festival Objectives

The Festival sought to -

- (1) provide a platform for youth to showcase their talents in sports, culture and entrepreneurship;
- (2) revive the Kadavu Provincial Rugby Union and the Provincial Youth Council;
- (3) encourage youth involvement in agribusiness and sustainable livelihoods;
- (4) build networks between youth clubs, investors and development partners;
- (5) create safe spaces for discussions on mental health, social issues and personal growth; and
- (6) revive Kadavu's traditional culture and identity through sports and arts.

The Festival engaged 52 registered youth clubs, involving more than 1,000 youth aged 15 years to 35 years, together with local leaders, students, entrepreneurs and community champions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the three days, the *Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival* was a vibrant showcase of talent, energy and collaboration. There were sports competitions, agribusiness training, cultural performances and awareness, interactive discussions as well. The Festival was graced by senior government officials, community elders and development partners - all united by one purpose to uplift the youths of Kadavu and help them to rise above challenges.

Major achievements and outcomes

Mr. Speaker, firstly, the reactivation and launch of the Kadavu Rugby Union during the festival breathed new life into the island's sporting landscape. It was one of the key objectives of the festival since Kadavu Rugby Union had been inactive for many years. Many had lost hope that Kadavu rugby would ever return to its former glory but during the *Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival*, the Ministry together with the Kadavu Provincial leaders and community, officially launched the rebirth of the Kadavu Rugby Union and the election of honourable Tabuya as its first female president. This moment reignited the spirit of teamwork, discipline and pride across the island.

The Ministry followed up with the provision of sports to registered youth clubs and sports equipment to strengthen the initiative. Mr. Speaker, Sir, today, less than two years later, Kadavu

Rugby has achieved the unthinkable.

Kadavu Women's Rugby Team first created history of their own – winning the Royal Ranadi Cup exactly one year after the Festival.

Kadavu has won the 2025 Vodafone Vanua Championship and earned promotion to the Skipper Cup for 2026. These victories are not mere sporting achievements, they represent a cultural and social transformation, the result of unity, discipline, and the empowering of youth and women through sports. They show how youth programmes can translate into tangible results — not just in sport, but in community pride and national recognition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, secondly, the Festival revitalised the Kadavu Youth Council and strengthened collaboration among youth clubs, providing a platform for leadership, advocacy and partnership.

Thirdly, through its agribusiness sessions and exhibitions, the Festival encouraged youths to shift from illicit crop cultivation to sustainable ventures in kava and taro farming, creating employment and promoting legal, profitable livelihoods. To that end, Vunisea Police confirmed a 60 percent decline in marijuana-related cases exactly one year after the Festival.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Festival's influence went beyond the sports field; it changed behaviour, reshaped attitudes, and restored dignity in communities.

Fourthly, the revival of traditional arts and performances fostered a renewed sense of identity and belonging, while open discussions on social issues promoted mental wellbeing and responsible citizenship.

Fifthly, Government Ministries, the Fiji Sports Council, Fiji National Sports Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture, and private sector partners all contributed to the Festival's success — a model of inter-agency cooperation that continues to inspire other provinces.

On its national impact and way forward, Mr. Speaker, the Vueti-Kadavu Youth Festival has proven that when you are given a voice and a vision, transformation follows. What we witnessed in Kadavu, from the rebirth of a rugby union to a championship title, is a clear reflection of what can be achieved when rural and maritime youth are empowered through sports, skills and community leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is undertaking plans to develop sports grounds, aimed at enhancing youth engagement in sports activities. In addition, we will be working in collaboration with other Government Ministries to design and implement an alternative livelihood programme to create broader economic opportunities.

The Ministry now has replicated the Vueti-Kadavu model across other Provinces and maritime islands - fostering unity, enterprise and national identity through youth empowerment.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to sincerely acknowledge -

- the Kadavu Provincial Council and Kadavu Youth Council for their leadership;
- all participating youth clubs and communities for their commitment;
- our valued partners and Ministries, who made the Festival possible; and
- the special presence of the Minister for Information, honourable Tabuya, who joined the Festival to support this cause and was later elected as the President of the Kadavu Rugby

Union – a historic milestone for women in leadership and sports administration in Kadavu.

Their collective efforts have transformed Kadavu into a model of what youth resilience, teamwork and determination can achieve.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the story of Vueti-Kadavu is a story of hope restored, dreams revived, and communities united. It is a story of a people who choose to rise, and in rising, inspired the nation.

From dormancy to dominance, the Kadavu Rugby Union's comeback is not just a sporting achievement, it is a national symbol of what empowerment looks like in action.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports remains steadfast in ensuring that every young Fijian, from Kadavu to Rotuma, from the highlands to our maritime islands, has the opportunity to rise, to lead, and to thrive.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the Ministerial Statement on the Vueti-Kadavu. I think the achievements, as you explained, have been articulated very well.

The revival of the Kadavu Rugby Union, I would like to pay appreciation to honourable Tabuya and her family members - Ane, Willie, and all of them who got around her to be able to do this, to get the fundraising, and the various *Tikina* in Kadavu and all the chiefs of Kadavu who got behind.

I think the achievements in sports field have been very dramatic and very fast within a short period of time. For those of us who remember club rugby in Suva at one time, one of the powerhouses here was the Kadavu Rugby Tam. We remember names, like Stone, Tuimasi, and even in a place where I come from, Wakanisila, we had three Fiji representatives who played for that team - Kemueli Musunamasi, Lei Matanatabu and his younger brother, but he played for the Army - Joeli Naqau.

There is this thing about rugby that is there, and I am sure that all the *Tikina* in Kadavu - Nabala, Koroivabea, Koroisoso, Namanusa, Naivibati and Nawaimalo, are very proud of their achievements. It is far easier to come from bad to good. It is maintaining the good to move to great is going to be the challenge, and that is the sustainability of things that we need to be able to do.

I go a lot to Kadavu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I have noticed the decline in the population. When there is a function, *me'ra lako me'ra lai salu*, hardly anyone brings anything back because a lot of the youth have left. I think this ability to be able to move people back, to have the opportunity to get into sustainable livelihood is important.

One of the advantages that Kadavu has is that it has frequent ships going to and from Suva. What we need to be able to do is strengthen the assistance and make sure that they have access to markets. Earlier this week, I talked about the road that goes from Vunisea, which was supposed to go to Vacalea, but currently in Joma. Once we complete that road, all the villages on that side will have an easier access to transport at the Naleca Jetty that allows them to move products.

The honourable Minister was talking about moving to kava and taro. In Dravuwalu now, there is a guava farm done by Roko Seru Nabalarua. These are the kinds of innovative things that we need

to be able to do. These are high-value type of products that can be done, that can encourage people to move back to the islands so that they can be there.

We have been talking a lot about the importance of people going offshore and not enough people being in the villages to do the work that needs to be done. I think if we are able to strengthen these infrastructure requirements and I talked about that particular road, I have also talked at length about the road that comes down from Nalotu, going down to Lomati and connect again to Nabukelevu-i-Ra, when you open up all of these accesses - access to the jetties and there have been talks about the Daku Jetty, one in Soso and the Muani Jetty, it has brought a lot of economic impact. The challenge for us is to be able to sustain it.

I think club rugby in Kadavu needs to be strengthened. As the honourable Minister was saying, we probably need to build a stadium in Namalata with a high performance unit and gymnasiums. I would also think there is a good ground in Muanisolo, and I would also suggest another area, perhaps the ground at Bulou Dolele Memorial School which also needs to be strengthened. All those areas, so people can have access to club rugby.

We do not want to be in a situation where the Kadavu team is good, but the club rugby is not working. I think that is a situation that not only happens in Kadavu, but in other places, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I am also glad to hear of the revival in tradition and identity. As I have said, I go to Kadavu a lot, and sometimes I am quite shocked about some of the youth who have lost their way – the way that they talk to each other and the way that they interact in the community.

I congratulate the honourable Minister, I congratulate the Province of Kadavu, the chiefs of the various *tikina* for working hand in hand with the 52 youth clubs, and I look forward to a better future.

MR. SPEAKER. - I thank the honourable Usamate for the Opposition's statement. I am personally delighted with the Minister's statement. My wife, Elina, and I are very proud of our traditional link to *Niusiladi Lailai* - she to Lawaki and me to Kabariki. So, Rise Kadavu, as your Minister says!

Update on Water Authority of Fiji's Key Outputs – 2022-2025

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, guests, ladies and gentlemen; I rise today to present to this august House some of the achievements of the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) over the past three financial years -from 2022 to 2025 to 2026. These achievements go beyond the construction of infrastructure. They represent the fulfilment of Government's vision for equity, resilience and sustainable development.

The mission has been clear, that access to clean and reliable water is not a privilege for some, but a constitutional right for all Fijians. Let me stress that this statement is not about what FijiFirst has achieved or started or what the Coalition Government has done, but rather what has been achieved by the Government, WAF, given our collective responsibilities as leaders, whoever is in power. The provision of water is about the delivery of a basic need, but not about who is in power.

The financial year 2022-2023 marked a crucial turning point by the WAF, a year of rebuilding momentum and reaffirming our national commitment to water security, following the unprecedented disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a year that tested our resilience and reaffirmed our

purpose. Despite global economic challenges, supply chain disruptions and workforce restrictions, WAF remains steadfast in fulfilling its vision to provide clean water and sanitation for all Fijians.

In the 2022-2023 financial year, a total of 3,308 new water meters and 204 new wastewater meters were connected, bringing much-needed water and sanitation services to households and communities that had long awaited inclusion. These new connections demonstrated Government's ongoing effort to expand access, promote public health and support the recovery of communities from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Various packaged plants, et cetera, were commissioned in late 2022, such as Waiwai, Ba, and Savusavu. At Vunidawa, Naitasiri, a new packaged plant with a capacity of 500,000 litres per day was commissioned in mid-2023 at a cost of \$3.3 million. Fully funded by Government, it supports the Vunidawa Government Station, hospitals, schools and neighbouring villages, benefiting around 1,100 Fijians, and allowing for future expansion.

In Sigatoka, approximately 300 residents from Malamalo and Naidiri Villages now have access to clean water through a \$737,000 metered supply project. The project included construction of a new 90,000-litre reservoir and water extension to 60 farming households.

Additionally, the Balevuto Plant Optimisation Project, completed in 2023 at a cost of \$1.3 million, significantly improved water supply reliability for 3,000 residents. Through electrical and mechanical upgrades, the 4-megalitre plant now operates more efficiently, ensuring continuous delivery of clean water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while these projects may vary in scale, collectively they form the foundation of our national water resilience. They reaffirm that Government's investments extend beyond major towns and cities, reaching deep into rural and peri-urban areas, providing every Fijian family with dignity, safety and hope, in terms of water.

The year 2022-2023 demonstrated that even in the face of global and local challenges, WAF continues to uphold its vision and mission and commitment to service delivery.

For 2023-2024, in terms of extending the reach, it was a defining period for WAF - a year that marked both, transformation and expansion, in the reach and reliability of our nation's water infrastructure. Having strengthened our foundation in the previous year, the focus was towards broadening service coverage, modernising assets and building resilience into every aspect of the operations.

One of the landmark achievements in the financial year was the launch of the Water Sector Strategy 2050, costed at approximately \$8.7 billion - a visionary roadmap that sets Fiji's direction for water and wastewater services for the next three decades. This Strategic Plan addresses climate vulnerability, ageing infrastructure and promotes circular economy principles, ensuring sustainability and resilience in service delivery. It aligns closely with the principles of the National Development Plan, and supports the national vision for inclusive, climate-resilient development. Most importantly, it reinforces the Government's unwavering commitment to upholding every citizen's constitutional right to clean and safe drinking water.

A highlight was the completion of the new Viria Water Treatment Plant, a state-of-the-art facility and one of the largest in the South Pacific region with a treatment capacity of 40 million litres per day. This strategic investment has transformed water supply services across the Central Division, providing clean and consistent water to more than 360,000 Fijians living along the Lami-Suva-Nausori corridor. Mr. Speaker, those same areas from Nausori, Tailevu and Rewa, once plagued by

intermittent water supply, now enjoy consistent, high-quality water.

During the financial year, 31.5 kilometres of pipeline extensions were completed, benefitting around 47,000 Fijians. These extensions demonstrate WAF's effort to connect more communities and expand the boundaries of coverage.

Alongside the major developments, the Sawani to Viria Pipeline Project - an extension of the Viria Project, saw the installation of 24.5 kilometres of pipeline, further strengthening the supply network and ensuring efficiencies in water supply to households and communities.

In the West, in Nadroga, the Vusama and Navisabasaba Village Water Project was completed at a cost of \$3.4 million for the 120-plus households in the villages. It was the first time water flowed consistently through taps at their homes, instead of depending on wells. The project laid 8.4 kilometres of new pipeline, connected directly into WAF's network and built a distribution system robust enough for future generations. For mothers and children who used to carry buckets from streams and the wells, if you have been there, this might be the end of decades of hardship.

The WAF also completed 10 rural water projects, providing clean and safe water to 2,900 Fijians who previously lacked access. This included new water schemes, household standpipes and shower installations, enabling families in rural and remote communities to enjoy the same quality of service as those in urban areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these projects may serve a relatively small population, but the depth of transformation that has brought to the lives of those in those communities is profound, as you may understand. Families are living with the assurances that water will be there when they awake, when they cook and also, for sending their children to school.

On the global stage, WAF proudly represented Fiji at the International Water Association World Water Congress and Exhibition in Canada. This platform brought together global leaders and experts in water management. The WAF was recognised with the Climate Smart Utility Recognition Award 2024. This honour reflects WAF's continuous integration of climate-smart approaches in its infrastructure planning, operations and service delivery, reinforcing Fiji's reputation as a regional leader in sustainable water management.

The financial year 2023-2024 truly showcased WAF's expanding reach from our urban to rural areas.

In the financial year 2024-2025, Building for Growth and Resilience was the underlying theme. The WAF was allocated a total budget of \$259 million, comprising \$135 million for capital expenditure (CAPEX) and \$123 million for operational expenditure (OPEX).

I am pleased to report that capital expenditure execution reached 94 percent, while operational expenditure utilisation achieved 100 percent, a strong testament to fiscal discipline and performance efficiency.

A total of 1,800 new water meters and 93 new wastewater meters were connected to reticulation systems, expanding WAF's reach to previously unserved communities.

In the Central Division, we also saw remarkable progress under the Rewa River Water Supply Scheme, a programme designed to expand reliable water access across the Division. Two major projects reached completion during this financial year, marking significant milestones.

The Korovou to Veinuqa Village Upgrade and Extension Project valued at \$5.8 million, is now nearing completion. This critical investment involves the laying of 7.65 kilometers of new pipeline, directly benefiting approximately 5,000 Fijians across Korovou, Veinuqa and nearby communities. The project enhances water reliability, particularly for rural households, schools and farming settlements that previously faced prolonged dry spells and intermittent supply.

The second, Koronivia Road Junction to Lokia Water Mains Project, valued at \$6 million was also successfully completed under the same scheme. This project has brought relief to around 4,000 Fijians, significantly improving water pressure and distribution efficiency across the area.

Together, these projects form part of the Rewa River Supply Scheme's broader strategy to strengthen water security for Central Division communities, ensuring that development flows hand in hand with access to essential services. This stand as tangible evidence of the Government's commitment to inclusive growth and equitable service delivery, bridging the divide.

In the Northern Division, the Nabouwalu Water Treatment Plant was completed at a cost of \$5.4 million. With a capacity of 2 million litres per day and a 500,000 litres reservoir, this plant now serves around 3,000 fellow Fijians in Nabouwalu and surrounding communities, laying the foundation for future township growth.

In the Western Division, the Malake Island Project was completed at a cost of \$1.1 million, involving the installation of a 3-kilometer submarine pipeline from Naria to Malake Island. As a result, 645 residents now have uninterrupted access to clean water even during national disasters.

The Varaqe-Saru Pipeline Project in Nadi-Lautoka, valued at \$9.6 million, involved laying 5.5 kilometres of pipeline through rocky terrain. It now secures the stable raw water supply to the Saru Water Treatment Plant, benefiting 25,500 Fijians in the greater Lautoka-Nadi region.

In Vusama and Navisabasaba villages, a \$3.4 million water supply project brought continuous water to 120 households for the first time with 8.4 kilometres of pipeline laid.

On rural water, 13 rural water supply projects were completed around the country, namely Nawaqabena Village, Navutu Village, Nauluvatu Village and various other locations – 7 in the Central Division, 3 in the Western Division and 3 in the Northern Division with a total cost of \$2.5 million, benefitting approximately 3,300 Fijians. These projects have brought reliable water closer to the homes of those living in the remote communities.

In addition, WAF successfully delivered 1,187 rainwater harvesting tanks to rural communities that remain outside the current WAF network.

The rural programmes directly contribute to the outcomes of the Water Sector Strategy 2050, promoting gender and social inclusion. Women and girls who once walked long distances for water, now access at their doorsteps – a milestone in rural development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of July 2025, 31,600 households are also benefiting from the Free Water Allowance Scheme, where those who are eligible must have a combined annual income of less than \$30,000.

A new initiative is the apprenticeships - 86 apprentices (30 women and 56 men) including catchment and facility landowners joined WAF under a structured apprenticeship partnership with the Fiji National University. This initiative attempts to address critical skill shortages and builds a gender-inclusive workshop for the future, an important step aligned with the Water Sector 2050

Strategy.

In addition, WAF successfully installed generator sets at 14 major pump stations. This critical upgrade ensures that power supply is available during outages and to maintain uninterrupted supply. These includes the installation in Rotuma of three Gensets as backup to the existing infrastructure and improves the reliability of supply from the three borehole pumping stations. Of course, we are also currently scoping more sustainable options such as bigger capacity solar-powered pumps.

The Non-Revenue Water (NRW) Performance-Based Contract - this has already been mentioned a few times. This is targeted at reducing leakages in our major pipelines.

In addition, the Board also approved a comprehensive Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) and the outcomes to ensure that our employees are fairly compensated with market-based salaries. We all understand the outflow of technical people, and it is necessary that we take this step. Sir, WAF has adjusted salaries and wages, in addition, the outstanding allowances, including wet and dirty adjusted allowances, which have been issues of contention for quite some time.

The 2024 financial year stands as a powerful demonstration of WAF's growth moving forward, with strong performance and high investments in our infrastructure. Over the three years, more than 20 major capital projects have been completed, representing an investment of over \$334 million. The direct beneficiaries exceed 230,000 Fijians spread across all our divisions.

As we look back, the impact of our Water Authority of Fiji and their work is deeply meaningful. As we move forward from the corridors around Suva, the urban areas, right down to our villages and schools, a lot, of course, needs to be done with continuous improvement and commitment of the key stakeholders and elements in this work. We have seen WAF evolve from a utility provider to becoming a driver of national development. The Authority's achievements over the last three years reflect a commitment to deliver a basic need to all as witnessed, or as I have already stated.

In the financial year 2025-2026, there are various programmes which we had budgeted for. Two of the major developments is the elevated Princess Road project, which you may have seen or heard in terms of commissioning or the launching. This involves the construction of 11.7-kilometre pipeline from Sawani to Colo-i-Suva and Khalsa Road supported by a new pump station midway and two 5 megalitre reservoirs in Colo-i-Suva. If you pass that side, the work has begun. This will ensure 24/7 uninterrupted water supply to communities such as Sakoca, Dokanaisuva, Tacirua, Colo-i-Suva and, of course, Lami and greater Suva areas.

In addition, we have also done the groundbreaking for a 20-megalitre Tamavua Modular Water Treatment Plant, to complement the current plant, costing \$12 million, providing supply to more than 200,000 people in the Suva, Lami and Nausori areas and parts of Nasinu. This will strengthen resilience in addition to the first project that I mentioned. These two projects will finally alleviate the sufferings of the people in these areas in the past.

In terms of the current budget, the budget allocates \$2.9 million in the Western Division. This includes water mains upgrading, water extensions for the various communities in the West and, of course, in the Northern Division, \$5.6 million to upgrade the Benau Water Treatment Plant.

The Water Authority of Fiji has begun works for the proposed Wainivasa Water Source in Taveuni. I will expand on that in one of the answers to the questions. These projects in the North will directly improve the lives of approximately 6,000 Fijians.

In terms of wastewater, this has also been mentioned previously by the honourable Minister for Finance - \$15.1 million has been set aside for the wastewater programme. Major projects include the \$1.3 million for the Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade, \$0.86 million Packaged Wastewater Treatment Plant in Pacific Harbour. Of course, there is also works planned for the Denarau Island Wastewater Upgrade. There is the ongoing Rainwater Harvesting, Rural Water Carting, and the Rural Water Supply Scheme.

Another ongoing initiative is the Kubulau Combined Scheme in Bua with the installation of 33 kilometres of pipeline, two reservoirs and multiple standpipes to serve 1,050 residents across nine villages. This implementation is ongoing and progressing satisfactorily.

All these projects, Mr. Speaker, Sir, reflect the Government's commitment, not only this Government, but, of course, the previous governments. We build on their successes and on the infrastructure that has been built in the past to continue the good work to deliver as far as this critical step is concerned.

As we step into the next cycle under the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and the Water Sector Strategy 2050, these projects are the foundation. I have not mentioned others in detail. For example, there is the Nagado Water Treatment Plant Upgrade, extended pipelines Bilo Road and numerous others. As I already mentioned, we, as a government, are here to build on past successes and move forward and whatever government comes in, that is the task they have to complete or work on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the dedication of the Water Authority Board, management and staff especially those working out there in the wet, heat and the mud, day and night when there are emergencies. I thank them sincerely for their work as we move forward. It is our collective responsibility as leaders to build on the infrastructure of the previous governments and continue to build. The Coalition Government has done that and will continue to do so moving into the future.

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

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to reply to the honourable Minister's Ministerial Statement. It is very refreshing to hear about the scale and complexity of the water sector. This is by no means an easy task.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fixing our water woes whether in the Suva-Nausori corridor or the Nadi-Lautoka corridor or anywhere else in Fiji is not a simple undertaking. It is a necessary, expensive and inevitable commitment to national survival. I thank the honourable Minister and the Water Authority of Fiji for completing the projects as mentioned by the honourable Minister.

Our analysis based on WAF's own data confirms the severity of the infrastructure emergency the Minister now confronts. First one is a century old problem. Sir, WAF is grappling with pipelines that are 50 to over 100 years old, leading to frequent catastrophic bursts and service interruptions. We can see intermittent water breaks along the Suva-Nausori area. Massive waste, non-revenue water losses are devastating and WAF is losing about 45 percent to 47 percent of all treated water nationally. In some systems, losses reach 61.5 percent, and this represents an annual economic cost of approximately \$23 million down the drain. Capacity strain, our legacy treatment plants are running at 110 percent of capacity yet still cannot meet the demand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this challenge is not confined to WAF alone. The International Monetary Fund flagged ageing infrastructure across water, electricity, waste and transport as an urgent national priority in its 2025 review. The honourable Minister for Finance has stated that bridging the

infrastructure gap for the Pacific will cost billions. Fiji's repair bill is not in the millions but in the billions, required to bring our basic utilities up to standard and make them climate resilient.

Trade transport, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Roads Authority faces similar decay. The \$70 million Tamavua-i-Wai Bridge Project and the larger \$464 million World Bank ADB critical bridge project along the Queen's Road are emergency replacements of structures operating past their life cycle, vital for over half a million Fijians. These examples prove this is a systemic multi-sector failure of national asset management. It requires generational commitment and most importantly, non-political focus. The forthcoming \$284.4 million allocated to WAF is just one piece of a colossal puzzle that will demand continuous strategic funding from this Government and future governments for the next 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministers current focus on securing 24/7 water supply is necessary, but the irony should not be lost in this House. The flagship solution being, commissioned today, the Viria Water Project which adds 40 million litres per day of critical capacity was meticulously mapped out as an infrastructure blueprint of the previous government.

While the current administration is now rightly celebrating its completion, they are in fact validating the foresight and scale of that original vision. The Minister's success lies in embracing this continuity and putting sustained capital investment such as the forthcoming \$284 million budget allocation above political manoeuvring.

We commend the rhetoric shift towards acknowledging the systemic constraints WAF faces and working as a facilitator to support staff who have been unfairly criticised for managing an impossible task. The challenge of building climate resilience 24/7 water and sanitation services for his own the immense difficulty of the file he holds.

I assure him, and the nation, that come next year, or the year after, the next Minister for Public Works regardless of which side of the House they come from, will also find this task incredibly difficult. The way forward is not in looking back to assign blame, but in maintaining the political consensus and financial commitment required to complete the infrastructure vision that has now been established. It demands long term planning and not short-term political whims.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Development of the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (Question No. 206/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the Ministry's collaborative work with other relevant stakeholders on the development of the Drug Rehabilitation Centre.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Koroilavesau for his question. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services acknowledges the need for this service given the current trend of illicit drug use in the country and anticipates that the need will increase in the coming years.

The Ministry is leading a multi-stakeholder effort to establish Fiji's first National Alcohol and

Drug Recovery Centre, a landmark initiative to address the substance use through treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The work is progressing on two fronts.

Firstly, under the Australia-Fiji Health Programme, consultancy work is underway where an external expert on drug rehabilitation services has been engaged to develop a national plan for drug rehabilitation services, aligned with Fiji's Counter Narcotics Strategy.

The expert's work includes undertaking a situation analysis of drug use and rehabilitation service gap that currently exists in Fiji, through in-depth consultation with government agencies, NGOs, faith-based groups and affected individuals, and proposing a sustainable model of community and correction-based rehabilitation service that is suited for Fiji. In addition, making recommendations for policy, legal and operational reforms that will facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of these rehabilitation services to every Fijian who need them. The Ministry anticipates this report will be available in December for further actions by the Ministry.

Secondly, the Ministry is working closely with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) as a partner through a submission by the Ministry for the construction of a new Ambulatory Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Centre. This is a multi-million-dollar project for a fully equipped modern rehabilitation facility in Suva, and it will take, at least, five years to construct and equip.

KOICA has completed feasibility studies, and we expect final approval from the South Korean National Assembly in December this year. Once established, the Centre will:

- deliver clinical care and structured rehabilitation services;
- train doctors, nurses, psychologists and community health workers;
- facilitate national awareness campaigns and referral systems; and
- work in partnership with NGOs, families and community groups for the reintegration of rehabilitated individuals back into society.

Through this project, the training of healthcare workers for these services will take place in Korea and locally, to build a local capacity in these services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note that this will be a new service for the country that will be delivered on a wider scope and scale. The Ministry acknowledges that there are current civil society organisations that have already started to deliver rehabilitation services to affected individuals, and we appreciate their services.

The Ministry will work with all stakeholders, as we establish and deliver these services. We also believe that a whole-of-nation response that is grounded in compassion, evidence and partnership will be required to build a rehabilitation system that restores dignity, reduces harm and offers hope to those affected by the ill effects of substance abuse.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a home front effort and a deliberate question that I have come here to Parliament to ask because my family would normally punch me on the stomach every time a parliamentary sitting has been completed.

The issue is that when drug addicts fill our streets, there seems to be an indication that they are the same people who would appear in other centres around Fiji and beg on our streets. The importance of consultation with different agencies, especially with the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, is quite imminent and important. I want to ask the honourable Minister if there is some corresponding data in relation to this with the Ministry of Women that has been captured by the Ministry of Health for this initiative?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, I believe there are some data available but I can furnish you with the data after this.

In terms of working in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, we, in the Ministry, do play a role in working together, but also both Ministries work together assisting NGOs that deliver this service for us, and that is where the commonality, I believe, lies in our work.

In terms of the data, yes, we can provide the data for you. Nevertheless, from my information that I have gathered not too long ago, I believe there are cases of people who roam the streets who are drug users or addicts, so they are the people we want to help with their addiction so that they can be reintegrated back into society.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, I was approached for some advice a few weeks ago concerning inmates. I know that you are going to look at the National Centre, but I think the Department of Corrections is worried about inmates who are also drug users and they have to provide these services as well. How will this fit into the National Centre that you are considering whether inmates will be taken separately? This is thinking long term because it is almost everywhere and I wanted to raise this question because it was raised with me as well two weeks back.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable of Opposition for the supplementary question. I believe the Ministry of Health works in close collaboration with the Fiji Corrections Service in terms of their medical department and we assist them. I believe we have an MOU with them, so in the long-term aspect of things, especially with the rehabilitation of drug addicts who are also incarcerated, that is something that we can incorporate into the current MOU we have with the Fiji Corrections Service through the Ministry of Justice. They have a medical department that we assist with tests, et cetera, so it is something we will also consider, moving forward.

Fiji's Engagement with the World Bank
(Question No. 207/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on Fiji's engagement with World Bank to advance development agenda and regional priorities within the World Bank Group's strategic initiatives?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Bank has been one of our key development partners and has contributed a lot towards our infrastructure development, post-disaster response and reconstruction. Also, they have assisted in our social protection, fiscal support and private sector development. This is in line with their mission to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity in a liveable planet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji became a member of the World Bank in May 1971, with the first loan funding provided for Suva-Nadi Highway. Currently, the total outstanding borrowing from the World Bank stands at FJ\$1.35 billion, or 12.5 percent of our total debt, or 36.1 percent of total external debt. The World Bank is our third largest lender, after Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) and Asia Development Bank (ADB).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2019, Fiji has been classified as a blended country with the World Bank, which basically means that we now have access to the highly concessional loan funding

through the World Bank's International and Development Association (IDA), and we also have access to normal market-based loan funding through the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) resources.

Of the outstanding loan financing FJ\$1.35 billion from the World Bank, \$407.7 million is from the IBRD at a 15-year term, including a three-year grace period, and based on Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) linked market interest rate. Also, \$945 million from World Bank IDA at a 40-year term, including a 10-year grace period at an annual service charge of 0.75 percent. This means that 7 percent of our debt from the World Bank is on highly concessional terms with a grant element of over 50 percent in present value terms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, engagement with Fiji is guided by the Fiji Country Partnership Framework, which is aligned with our National Development Plan, and focusses on building climate resilient infrastructure, health sector support, tourism development and private sector development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to share with honourable Members some of the World Bank's recent financing and support which includes the budget support of approximately \$800 million, including during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown when it helped the Government to maintain essential services and social protection programmes for the vulnerable at a time of our greatest need and, that is, to help fund reforms for economic recovery, building fiscal, climate and disaster resilience. Also, the foundation for accelerated private sector developments and jobs.

The second one is the Vanua Levu Tourism Development Project - a multi-phase programme of approximately \$450 million over the next 10 years, which responds to the need for investment and jobs in Vanua Levu, a historically lagging region, and promotes sustainable tourism development in the area. Officially launched in September 2024, it is expected to directly benefit approximately 60,000 Fijians.

The third is the critical support for resilient transport infrastructure of approximately \$220 million. In the face of climate change, with financing for rehabilitation of critical roads and rebuilding of major national bridges to adapt to climate shocks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Bank is also assisting the Government with key analytical work, which helps inform the Government's evidence-based and data-driven policy-making process. Recent examples include the Fiji Health Sector Review, which was launched by the honourable Prime Minister last year, which identified reform and investment needs in the Fijian health system. That is to meet the challenges of preventing, detecting, and managing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). It helped set out the Government's path for a phased approach, investing in primary healthcare and in cutting-edge tertiary hospital care, to enable Fiji to improve its health outcomes.

The World Bank's Fiji Public Expenditure Review helped inform our efforts to reduce Fiji's high public debt, which had surged due to the COVID-19 pandemic and tropical cyclones, and our actions for fiscal sustainability such as improvement of tax collection, limiting the cost of Civil Service, and reallocating spending from salaries to essential services like health, education and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Bank has supported Fiji to access regional funding from its concessional arm, IDA, which enabled Fiji to lead regional projects, increase its IDA allocation on the regional projects at very concessional terms, including grant financing. The regional projects include regional healthcare, the Pacific Healthy Islands Transformation Project of around US\$236.5 million of which, US\$50 million is provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), US\$30 million by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund and US\$8.4 million by the

Pandemic Fund, which will support the transformation of the Pacific health system into fit-for-purpose primary healthcare and also oriented health system that promotes health and deliver adequate preventative and curative services in the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second project for the region is the acceleration trade facilitation and logistics in the Pacific of around US\$59.5 million, which will lower cross-border trade time and and boost trade resilience. Building on regional strategies and national goals, the project supports trade procedures, integrated customs solutions and targeted investments in trade and customs infrastructure. It also assists with capacity building for regional trade facilitation organisations.

The third regional project is strengthening the Correspondent Banking Relationship (CBR), costing around US\$68 million, through the World Bank support in helping ensure that Pacific Island countries stay connected to the global financial system. The regional project will enable continuous access to correspondent banking services in participating Pacific Island countries through services by qualifying financial institutions in the Pacific Island countries, facing the complete loss of CBR in a key currency.

The fourth is a new regional education project currently under development, which aims to strengthen educational outcomes across Pacific Island countries, including Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji and the World Bank will continue to maintain its close collaboration and partnership in the coming years. This is also justified by the increase in access to financial support that I have highlighted above from the World Bank Group. With a regional office in Suva, it will continue to make communication and collaboration with Fiji, the Pacific, and with the World Bank Group, much more efficiently.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development clarify further on when did Fiji gained access to the World Bank's IDA and what are the benefits?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji gained access to the World Bank's IDA in 2019. This change followed the World Bank's Group 2018-2019 reclassification of Fiji from an IBRD-only country, borrowing at market-based terms, to a blend country, meaning it could access both IBRD finances for middle-income borrowers at market interest rates, as well as IDA, that is, for countries with low income or higher vulnerabilities at high concessional rates. The decision recognised Fiji as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) and the vulnerability that comes with it, particularly to climate change, natural disasters, and external shocks, like cyclones and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fiji first received IDA financing in 2020, including the COVID-19 response support and disaster recovery programmes. The IDA is the World Bank's concessional financing arm and provides highly concessional loans and long maturities of 40 years. They provide grants as well, depending on debt sustainability assessments, as well as technical assistance and policy support in key development sectors.

Access to IDA funding helps with lowering financing costs for the Government, including rebuilding our fiscal space and helping mobilise financing from other developing partners, such as ADB and others.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in terms of our country's loan portfolio, is the larger percentage of that portfolio with the World Bank, or is it evenly spread out amongst different financial institutions?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, I think I have answered that question, that is, 36.1 percent of our total external debt is with the World Bank.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A point of clarification, my question was, is the larger percentage with the World Bank - not the whole external debt?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his response to that question. He talked about the concessional loan with long payment plans. My question is; how is the Government balancing World Bank loans and financing with concerns around national debt sustainability and fiscal responsibility?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- That sounds like a new question, but I will shortly give an answer. We do consider both the debt and our needs or our development goals or economic growth. In terms of debt and in terms of our growth, as I had mentioned, when the new government came in, we have to face a lot of challenges and that probably delayed some of our objectives for growth.

Going into the future, we will balance the two, but our second aim is to have our economic growth. Once we have good growth, our debt can be taken care of sufficiently.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think this is an appropriate point for a break. We will suspend our proceedings for our lunch, and Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.22 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the Oral Questions for today. I now call on honourable Hem Chand to ask his question. We are glad that the honourable Member is without harm and is well after the story of your accident yesterday. Welcome back! Please, proceed.

Upskilling of Secondary School Teacher Graduates
(Question No. 208/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the Ministry's plans to upskill secondary school teacher graduates teaching in primary schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. We are talking about 600 secondary school teacher graduates currently deployed and teaching in primary schools due to several factors.

As the honourable Member is aware, it happened during his time when he was Head of Human Resources in the Ministry of Education. The Ministry did not complete process due to shortages of qualified primary graduates. At the same time, there were surpluses in secondary school graduates in special subject areas, like language, social science, commerce, agriculture and home economics, so they are given the option to teach in primary schools or wait for a vacancy in their subject area in secondary schools. Those teachers, understandably, bring valuable subject knowledge. We recognise the importance of giving them pedagogical skills appropriate for the primary level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I continue further, I wish to inform this august House that there will be over 390 primary school teacher graduates from the three Teacher Training Institutions graduating at the end of this year. We are going to give them opportunities to fill in these places. The secondary graduates currently teaching in primary schools will be replaced by these qualified primary graduates. The secondary teachers who are in the primary schools will be posted to secondary schools, depending on the vacancies in their respective disciplines.

The breakdown of primary teachers graduating, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from FNU, they are about 278 teachers who will be graduating; Fulton College will be around 82; Corpus Christi Teachers College - 34, which comes to a total of 394 teachers for now.

In terms of the upskilling of teachers currently teaching in primary schools for secondary school graduates, programmes include targeted professional development, as the honourable Member is fully aware of, as well honourable Kumar, training modules have been delivered through the Fiji National University, focussing on child-centred teaching strategies, literacy and numeracy education, and classroom management tailored for younger learners.

Secondary graduates in primary schools are required to complete 80 units towards their Graduate Certificate in Education Primary. This bridging programme allows secondary schools training, just to gain formal qualification in primary education through flexible study options, and also there is some in-service programmes that are offered through Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service in which these teachers are encouraged to undertake.

Also, there is a curriculum orientation from our Curriculum Officers. Teachers are being supported by Heads of Primary Schools, District Education Officers and CAS Officers to familiarise themselves with the primary school curriculum, including the use of age-appropriate assessment tools and learning resources.

We also have the mentorship and peer support. The honourable Member is fully aware of that as well. Heads of Primary Schools and experienced primary school teachers' mentor, guide and support these secondary school graduates through professional development and regular training, including feedback and collaborative learning. The Ministry of Education monitors the effectiveness of this initiative through school visits, teacher assessment feedback and student learning outcomes to ensure continuous improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these efforts reflect our commitment to ensuring that every child in Fiji receives quality education, regardless of their location. Investing in the professional growth of our teachers, we are strengthening the foundation of our education system.

HON. H. CHAND.- I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his response. Yes, the number of secondary graduate teachers who are teaching in primary schools has increased in the last few years - it has gone up to 600 now. It is very important to upskill these teachers, and it is good to hear from the honourable Minister that the Ministry is in talks with the Teacher Training Institutions on designing the basic primary teacher training for the secondary graduates teaching in primary schools. My question is, is there a timeline as to when this upskilling or training will be rolled out?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, it started during the time when the honourable Member was Head of Human Resources, so that was three years or five years ago.

In terms of timeline, it is an ongoing process. We would like to set a timeline, but because of the desires of the respective teachers, they prefer to teach in secondary school, so it is on a voluntary basis. If they wish to continue teaching in primary, we will give them the leeway to decide whether they want to continue at the primary school level, or they wish to go into their speciality subjects.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Yesterday, the honourable Minister for Education said my question would be possibly an AI-generated question. I think that that is undermining the efforts of Opposition in debating. These questions were from the teachers themselves.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Oh, you wait!

Honourable Minister, the need for upskilling these teachers are important, but does your Government have the finances to pay their salary, upgrade their salary, and give them what they deserve? Yes or no, or by when will this be done? This question was not answered yesterday. Thank you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a totally new question from the original question. However, as a responsible government, we can assure you that the payment will be processed in the next pay run, which is only for those who have applied within the period that is stipulated in the policy.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister just said that for secondary graduates who are teaching in primary school, it is up to them. It is voluntary for them to do this

bridging course. Now, that is a bit worrying, particularly the statement itself, because any teacher who is teaching in primary school needs to have the skills to teach primary students. It is not like specialising in one subject - they teach so many things in primary school. I am quite surprised that the Ministry has moved away from ensuring that each and every teacher who is teaching in secondary school is qualified enough to teach primary students, and that was the policy then, it may have changed.

My question is, can the honourable Minister give us a number, like how many teachers have actually graduated from this bridging course that you are talking about? Are the secondary graduates who sat for the bridging course qualified now to teach in primary schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to answer the question regarding the number of graduates. There are some who have just recently graduated, I think, it is a little bit over 40, less than 50. That is the number of those who have been engaged in the Ministry. They work their way up by getting their Bachelors, specialising in the primary teaching.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a similar question I asked last year, if you can recall. I must declare my interest; I am the Manager of Baulevu High School as well. At Baulevu High School, we do not have a Language Teacher, Maths and Physics Teachers – the honourable Minister is aware of this. Similarly, in some of the Nausori schools, there are other schools that do not have teachers in the secondary school. Would the honourable Minister be able to clarify whether teachers currently posted in primary schools would probably be redeployed to secondary schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a process involved in terms of transferring teachers and appointing teachers to schools based on the subject needs of the schools and also the qualification of teachers. All those are taken into consideration, as you might be aware. We have shortages in specific areas - STEM subjects and PEMAC subjects. When we have the resources, we will apply them to the schools. I think that most of the schools have got the minimum number of teachers that is required for specific subjects.

Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting
(Question No. 209/2025)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the key outcomes of the recently held Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting or the ICAO General Assembly?

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. At the outset, I wish to clarify, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that my response today addresses the key outcomes of the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting in Vava'u, Tonga. Matters relating to the ICAO General Assembly will be raised in a Ministerial Statement.

Before I get into my reply, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just update the House on the situation at Denarau yesterday. I got a report from the General Manager of Marriott. As you know, Marriott operates four properties, that is, Marriott-Momi, Sheraton, Westin and Sheraton Tokoriki.

The 55 workers who were in that bus yesterday, four are admitted, the others were treated in the hospitals or medical facilities around Denarau and have all gone home. Marriott leadership was there almost instantly. The bus, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is contracted to them and it is part of their policy to ensure that the bus meets the highest standards, so they will be looking into how that accident

happened yesterday.

For the Marriott people, Mr. Speaker, they are all insured, they are all assured of their employment, they will continue to be paid, and they are getting the support system through food and other supplies for those who are affected. So, we can be assured, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that those 55 members of staff of Sheraton are in good hands and the bus is a 60-seater bus. It was not overloaded, as some may have earlier suggested. You can be assured that Marriot Sheraton with their culture of care are looking after their people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Minister and Senior Officials from across the Pacific met in Vava'u, Tonga, last week to reaffirm our shared commitments to tourism as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development. We also had the privilege to have with us, the Princess Royal, Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita, who is the patron of tourism in Tonga. For Fiji, it was a reflection of the Coalition Government's conviction that tourism is not only an economic pillar, but a bridge of solidarity, culture and opportunity for our region.

Fiji, Mr. Speaker, is the founding member and host country of the SPTO Secretariat. Of particular importance on this occasion, was Fiji's handover to Tonga as the Chair of the Council of Ministers. I was Chair up until last week. When I assumed the chairmanship, our shared vision was clear - to build a Pacific Tourism that is Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient.

Under the Coalition Government, Fiji continues to advocate for regional unity and shared prosperity. The SPTO platform allows us to speak as one Pacific voice, to protect our environment, to empower our people and to ensure that every visitor who sets foot on our shores contributes meaningfully to the wellbeing of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, along the margins, the Council endorsed the SPTO Strategic Plan 2025-2029, covering –

- sustainable destinations and management;
- marketing support and events;
- research coordination and insights;
- partner coordination and support;
- capacity building and training; and
- connecting tourism and aviation.

Those are measurable pathways for a Pacific that is resilient, innovative and united.

The plan aligns with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, reinforcing a central message that tourism must serve both, people and planet. Fiji strongly supports the framework. The Coalition Government believes that when we protect our reefs, forests and culture, we protect the future of our children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council was a recognition, that tourism and aviation are inseparable. The Pacific's geography demands reliable, affordable and sustainable air services. Without aviation, tourism cannot grow. Without tourism, aviation cannot thrive.

The Pacific Tourism and Aviation Strategy 2026-2030 was reviewed and endorsed during the meeting. Supported by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Strategy calls for greater investment in regional air connectivity, the exploration of sustainable aviation fuel options, and the strengthening of intra-Pacific routes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another highlight of the meeting was the focus on sustainability and innovation. The Council welcomed new initiatives that align technology with responsible tourism.

A Digital Measurement and Benchmarking Dashboard, funded by the New Zealand Government, was acknowledged as a powerful tool for data-driven decision-making. For the first time, the Pacific has a common platform to measure visitor trends, sustainability indicators and investment performance across all member countries.

Data will help us identify where tourism benefits communities, where environmental pressure points exist, and where policies need recalibration.

Equally significant were initiatives addressing the environmental footprint of tourism, such as guidelines to phase out single-use plastics, protect marine ecosystems, and improve eco-certification standards for accommodation. These measures reflect the Pacific's moral responsibility to safeguard our natural inheritance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council also reaffirmed that the Pacific Tourism Organisation must remain a standalone regional agency within the CROP family. It was a statement of conviction that tourism deserves its own platform, resources, and autonomy to drive development across the Pacific.

The SPTO's hybrid governance model, involving both public and private sectors, was acknowledged as one of the most effective in the region. Ministers endorsed further reforms to strengthen its accountability, improve member engagement, and modernise funding mechanisms.

For the coalition Government, this decision aligns with Fiji's belief in strong regional institutions. The success of SPTO is the success of every Pacific nation that depends on tourism for livelihoods and dignity.

The outcomes of the Council carry direct relevance for Fiji. The Coalition Government will align national policies with the SPTO Strategic Plan, to ensure that Fiji's tourism growth remains sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government remains deeply committed to the professional development of our people. We will expand training and mentorship through institutions such as the Fiji National University, ServicePro, Pacific PolyTech and the Pacific Tourism Research Institute.

We will also deepen our collaboration with regional and global partners - Australia, New Zealand, China, the European Union and others, to access funding, technology and expertise that support our long-term goals.

During Fiji's tenure as the Chair of the Council, our country demonstrated principled leadership, rooted in cooperation and respect. The Coalition Government takes pride in having steered discussions that reaffirmed Pacific's collective voice on tourism.

Fiji also hosted the South Pacific Tourism Exchange 2024, the first in over a decade, connecting 61 international buyers and 79 Pacific sellers - a clear sign of investor confidence in the region. This spirit of cooperation is what defines us as Pacific nations. We do not compete against one another - we complement and uplift each other.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting marked an important milestone for Fiji and the Pacific. The endorsement of the Strategic Plan strengthened the link between tourism and aviation, and the renewed focus on sustainability and governance reflect our region's maturity

and shared vision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the leadership of the Coalition Government, Fiji stands ready to translate these commitments into action. We will work tirelessly with our neighbours to ensure that tourism remains a force for good - protecting our environment, creating jobs and strengthening the bonds that unite our region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not only our responsibility, but also our legacy. Fiji will continue to lead with humility, purpose and political will. Thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his update on the Council of Tourism Ministers' Meeting and also the ICAO General Assembly. With respect to the General Assembly Meeting, honourable Minister, I understand that there would have been a lot of discussions around some of the legal frameworks and legal requirements with respect to taking aviation legislation into the future.

I also understand that there was some discussion regarding the extension of Chicago Convention which forms the basis of ICAO. Now, will that mean that we will also need to be doing some work at home with respect to our legislations and framework in terms of our civil aviation, once that is done or are we already kind of rolling that out in conjunction with ICAO requirements and whatever ICAO needs to be doing with respect to looking at the legislation?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated, I was going to give a Ministerial Statement tomorrow on the ICAO Assembly, but I can answer that now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have the Aviation Bill that is now making its way to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Legislation. Essentially, it combines all the five other Acts that were there. It has been there since 1979, and one of ICAO's recommendations was that we consolidate these into one, so the work is quite advanced. Hopefully, it will come to Parliament over the next couple of months, so that we will have a totally holistic Aviation Act for Fiji.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have some background to this question. The honourable Minister has spoken about shared prosperity, tourism, aviation industry and how ICAO is setting aviation standards, which is something I want to share in this Parliament the background to the question from a student in the aviation industry, as follows.

“I do not know what CAAF finds happy. Their personal grudge is destroying all hopes of the student has. Not every student's parents are rich. Some like mine take loans and the burden is on my father's shoulders. All my job applications are rejected as piloting licence does not have a diverse job application.”

The question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is, why do we talk about setting global aviation standards, but Government has failed to respond to the Pacific Flying School's aircraft that is grounded and is affecting more than 50 students' careers? Can we find a resolution?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- No, politics aside, the careers of these students are on the line, and they will not find a job. Honourable Minister, if you have an answer for these students - not for the Opposition, but for these students.

HON. V.R.GAVOKA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, training in aviation has to be accredited to standards that are set by CAAF. When they complete their training and they are given the qualification from the Flying School, CAAF has to licence them to be pilots, to validate them to be to be flyers. That is critical. Without that, a certificate given by the Flying School will be meaningless. What CAAF gives to give validity to a training certificate is valid all over the world. You need that CAAF validation.

Our issue with the school in Nadi is that this particular training provider is not meeting the standards of CAAF. It has done things outside of CAAF's established procedures. The CAAF has tried in many ways to engage with this school, to enable them to become compliant because CAAF is accredited by ICAO to do what is right. We cannot give validity to a company providing training that does not subscribe to the standards of CAAF.

It is very simple. You could ask a question one day, should we allow this trainer to continue to train our pilots if he does not subscribe to CAAF standards? That is a question that I could be asking one day. However, in the meantime, I have CAAF, trying really hard to work with the provider to rectify the areas that need to be rectified.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they play on the emotions of Government, showing all these children that are not being trained, but aviation is such - it has to be 100 percent. You cannot be up in the air and say, "Oh, I forgot to do something down here." It has to be 100 percent – the standards, there can be no compromises.

Unfortunately, we have grounded those aircrafts, we have grounded some of their people, we took away their licences because they did not subscribe to the standards set by CAAF, and he is one of the training providers. There are others in Nadi who are observing all the requirements by CAAF.

Fiji Airways, we audit them, and there are other numerous other operators who are audited and who come under the jurisdiction of CAAF. This particular one, we are trying to engage with them but, Mr. Speaker, it has been a difficult one, but we continue to engage.

There is this contention that Fiji's laws are archaic. Mr. Speaker, as I highlighted to honorable Koya, it is being reviewed to have a new Act, et cetera. If you do away with what you call as archaic, what will happen? They will be anarchy. So, we will work with what we have, and what we have has been audited by ICAO and you must know, that within the Asia and Pacific, Fiji's scores above average with ICAO. So, please, if the training provider wants to re-commence training, do what CAAF requires him to do. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I think the answer is clear enough for everyone, so we will now move on to the next question.

Plans for Local Organic Certification Programme
(Question No. 210/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture update Parliament on any progress pertaining to plans for a local organic certification programme to replace Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom)?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Koya for the question. I wish to begin by acknowledging the invaluable work of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom). As the Pacific region's peak body for organic movement,

POETCom has developed the Pacific Organic Standard and has facilitated its use by national bodies throughout the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under POETCom's leadership, we have seen the emergence of both, third-party certification schemes and tailor-made local Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) for small-scale farmers. POETCom, together with regional partners, has invested heavily on two interrelated pillars, the:

- (1) establishment of a regional pool of trained Pacific Islander Organic and Food Safety Auditors and consultants; and
- (2) development of low-cost peer review models for local certification.

By training auditors who understand our climate, our soils, and our traditional practices, we can reduce the high cost associated with overseas certification bodies and ensure that our farmers are assessed by individuals who truly appreciate their work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, local and regional market, POETCom, introduced the Pacific Organic Guarantee Scheme. This Scheme formally recognises PGS as a credible local peer-review mechanism. It is low-cost, democratic in process, and ideally suited to Fiji's rural communities.

Farmers form groups to conduct joint inspections and ensure compliance with agreed upon standards. As a result, there is greater ownership, mutual support amongst producers, and a certification process that works for them rather than imposing external costs and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Fiji, the PGS is an active community-based method for organic certification, primarily used for local and regional markets.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways supports PGSs, and it supports PGS's implementation and is currently in the process of finalising a national organic policy and action plan to establish a national framework - an official guideline for organics in Fiji, which could include formal government recognition of the PGS's process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to report that Fiji has now ratified the Global GAP Standard and is collaborating with Pharma Plus to craft a tailor-made Fiji Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) Standard. Achieving a Fiji GAP certification will mark a significant milestone, one that empowers our farmers to reduce chemical inputs now and transition to full organic production, if they choose.

To give organic agriculture real momentum, the national organic certification should be at two levels - one is semi-organic, which is GAP-based, and the second is full organic. Both levels will be officially recognised and prized to reward farmers with their efforts in reducing or eliminating synthetic inputs. Semi-organic is, in other words, a good agriculture practice level or standard, as the volume of chemical input is reduced.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, certification alone is not sufficient. The Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is firmly committed to finalising the National Organic Policy for Fiji. This Policy will mainstream organic agriculture as a pillar of national development, recognising its crosscutting benefits for public health, environmental resilient, rural livelihood and export growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the policy development process was inclusive and rigorous. The Ministry, in collaboration with Market Development Facility (MDF), convened two multi-stakeholder consultation workshops and held more than 20 individual meetings with farmers' associations,

certification bodies, technical experts and civil society representatives.

From this input, a comprehensive SWOT Analysis on Fiji's organic sector was developed - the strength to build upon the weaknesses that must be addressed, the opportunities to push and threats to mitigate. This work directly formed the policy vision, goals, objectives and action areas now before us.

The Ministry is in the final stages of validating the National Organic Policy. The target is to submit to Cabinet by early next year. Once endorsed, this Policy will guide every aspect of organic agriculture in Fiji, at least, in the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the draft Policy specifically addresses farmer's access to appropriate organic certification and the activities planned includes - certification awareness, providing growers with clear, accessible information, and the different types of organic certification, third party participation and also hybrid models and the relative merit of each of these operations.

On Organic Group Certification Support, working with existing PGS Group Managers, certification bodies and POETCom to establish:

- (1) new PGSs on third party programmes;
- (2) providing targeted funding support, including partial subsidies for set up of group organisation;
- (3) reviewing and revitalising past PGS groups;
- (4) conduct training for prospective participants in the Pacific Organic Standards and Pasifika System; and
- (5) harmonising of the IT system, streamlining certification processes and developing cost-effective information management platforms for PGSs.

Furthermore, we have drawn on POETCom's Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit to ensure that every element of Fiji's Policy is context-appropriate, regionally consistent and internationally defensible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry remains committed to continuing its close collaboration with POETCom throughout the certification rollout process. Over time, we will be transitioning from reliance on a regional body of a nationally governed system, anchored into our own legal framework, guided by the National Organic Policy and administered by Fijian experts.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must say that he is a very hardworking Minister for Agriculture. I thank him very much for the positive report with respect to organics. Just to put it into perspective, if I may be permitted, yesterday I received a message from Australia where the bird's eye chilli, the little red long ones that we get at home, is not even organic. They are sold at AU\$60 a kilogramme. So, you can see the kind of effect that an organic product can have if we can send it out of here to places that we actually export to.

Honourable Minister, I totally understand where we are at. I am grateful for a lot of work that has been going on, but all of these is, obviously, being in conjunction with us being able to use our Fijian organic branding out in the Ministry of Trade, together with the actual certification.

My question is, whilst all of this is being done, are we also simultaneously ensuring that the pathways that need to be created for the acceptance of our organic fruits and vegetables are actually clear, and I am talking about the US, Australia and New Zealand? What we effectively want is for our small-scale farmers and big-scale farmers, as soon as the branding is ready, they should be able

to export straightaway.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- That has been part of the work that the Ministry has been doing with the guidance from PHAMA Plus.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, be advised that Oral Question No. 211 of 2025 will drop, as it has been addressed by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services in his Ministerial Statement earlier today.

Constant Water Cuts and Shortages in Taveuni
(Oral Question No. 212/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services inform Parliament on the immediate and long-term measures to address the ongoing problem of constant water cuts and shortages experienced by residents in Taveuni?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Taveuni Water Supply System consists of four main water schemes, namely, Waiyevo, Bucalevu, Somosomo and Mua Water Schemes. Together these systems collectively serve approximately 5,000 immediate customers, benefiting over 23,500 population on the island.

To provide context, the:

- (1) Waiyevo Scheme supplies water to the Government station, commercial centres, nearby schools and surrounding communities, extending towards Wairiki.
- (2) Bucalevu Scheme serves the Bucalevu schools and customers residing along the highway to Naqara shopping area.
- (3) Somosomo Scheme provides water to Somosomo Village, Lamini and parts of Naqara.
- (4) Mua Scheme, located at the northern most part of Taveuni supplies nearby hotels and communities along Vacala, Matei, Naselesele and adjoining settlements.

The desalination plant located at Navaca is currently non-operational and unserviceable.

Among these, only the Mua Scheme, according to the information provided to me, experiences intermittent low water flow during prolonged dry periods. This is due to reduced spring yield at the source during drought conditions.

The immediate solution, Sir, WAF has implemented several immediate measures:

- water cutting;
- deployment of WAF's own truck, complemented by four water carting vendors on the island to deliver water to affected areas during supply disruptions;
- strategic valve operations during non-peak hours at night to boost supply to customers in elevated areas with reverse operations carried out in the morning to balance the network.

The long-term solution in terms of long-term measures, as highlighted in the Water Sector Strategy 2050, some of which are currently being implemented include the initiation of the Vakaderebua Water Supply Project, valued at \$2.8 million, which is currently under tender advertisement process. Once completed, this project will significantly increase production capacity

to both, Mua and Naselesele reservoirs, effectively resolving the low flow issues experienced under the Mua Scheme during droughts, et cetera.

Further, for South Taveuni, a new rural water supply project, titled Delaivuna Combined Water Scheme, has been funded in the current financial year. This project will initially serve the Delaivuna and Qarawalu areas, with plans for future extension to nearby settlements. The project is valued at \$1.9 million, which will benefit approximately 1,900 people in Taveuni.

Work is planned to start in January 2026, with half of the \$1.9 million project cost already allocated in this financial year. These investments reflect the Government's commitment to improving water reliability on Taveuni.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that this is an ongoing issue in Taveuni for such a long time. If I can be specific, honourable Minister, you have talked about Naselese and I do not know whether Naselesele needs it, and South Taveuni. However, this particular request was raised with me when I visited Taveuni and specifically, the Somosomo Water Scheme, because they have major accommodation hotels in there, on the issue of turbidity, especially when you have heavy rainfall. They are very worried because they have to provide alternative, particularly bottled water for their guests when they have this issue. So, more on the Somosomo Water Scheme, please.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have the technical specifications of what is happening, but definitely that is something to look at. In terms of turbidity, one thing we have identified is that the systems need to be upgraded to modern systems, which will reduce turbidity issues. For example, in Tamavua, that is what the new packaged plant will do – the continued issues of turbidity which are not adequately dealt by the whole Tamavua Water Treatment Plant. I suppose that is something that we need to look at and do a technical assessment in terms of the current supplies in Taveuni and, of course, with the new projects that are coming online.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has just mentioned about the desalination plant that was installed in Navaca in the Southern end of Taveuni. I understand you said it is beyond repair, but we cannot leave the people without water. What is your plan for that area, honourable Minister?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- As I had mentioned, we are currently catering that side with the current water carting and other temporary measures, but we are starting the programme in South Taveuni in January. There are no current plans to replace the desalination plant. That is an option which we are looking at. In terms of desalination, we need to look at sustainability. There are current discussions on having more solar power desalination plants. We are currently working with our development partners on that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on turbidity, one of the major issues now is the land use near the catchment areas. That is a very big issue in terms of farming, forestry and recent clearance experienced in a lot of areas, specifically areas where there is high turbidity along Sawani, the Waimanu River. This is an area in which we are currently facing ongoing problems and issues based on land use increases. Even though there might be some coordination issues with other agencies, for example, for soapstone or soil extraction and even gravel, I suppose, we will need to closely coordinate in that area to deal with the issue of turbidity.

Progress of the Building Permits Approval Subsystem
(Question No. 213/2025)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises, Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the progress of the Building Permits Approval Subsystem and the measures undertaken to ensure its effective implementation and uptake?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Tuinaceva for his question. The Building Permits Approval Subsystem (BPAS) is one of the results of the work that was done by the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce and Trade in trying to facilitate or ease the processes of setting up businesses in Fiji.

It is one of the most significant national reforms under the businessNOW FIJI project, which is Fiji Government's digital initiative to modernise public service delivery and improve the ease of doing business. This is the second phase of the project, following the successful launch of the Starting A Business Subsystem (SABS), in September 2024. Where SABS simplify the process of starting a business, BPAS will transform the building permit process, which is a vital part of investment and economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the results from SABS have been highly encouraging. Since its launch, the Government and its agencies have received 13,380 e-service applications, with more than 10,930 successfully processed across all participating agencies. The strong and growing adoption of SABS demonstrates that Fijians are ready and willing to embrace digital systems.

This success strengthens the foundation for BPAS, providing that an integrated whole-of-Government platform can work effectively, delivering faster, traceable and transparent services. Sir, BPAS is Fiji's first digital platform that enables individuals, developers and investors to submit building permit applications and obtain all relevant approvals online through one seamless process.

The system, Mr. Speaker, Sir, connects core agencies such as the Department of Town and Country Planning, National Fire Authority, National Occupational Health and Safety Service, utility authorities, Fiji Roads Authority, Municipal Councils, et cetera. This level of integration will make the process faster, cutting out duplication, and reducing the need for multiple in-person visits from agency to agency. Preparations for the soft launch of BPAS is currently underway and the system has undergone design, testing process, alignment to ensure readiness across all agencies.

Recognising the central role of Municipal Councils, the Ministry has adopted a phased approach to implementation. The first group of five Councils will go live in the initial phase, with the remaining Councils transitioning gradually until February 2026. This gradual rollout ensures that lessons from the initial phase can be applied to improve later transitions, enhancing stability and quality service delivery from day one.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure effective implementation, the Government has prioritised capacity building and change management. Decentralised training has been conducted across Fiji, where officers from all participating agencies have received hands-on instruction to strengthen system familiarity and enhance service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agency champions have been trained to act as focal officers within their

organisations, promoting accountability, maintaining ownership and training new staff as the system expands.

A series of change management workshops is also being held with Councils and key agencies. These sessions focused on operational readiness, transformation and communication, helping agencies prepare for the cultural and operational shift to digital service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to complement these efforts, the Ministry has developed and distributed designs of awareness materials, such as posters and pull-up banners for participating agencies. That ensures that information about BPAS is presented collaboratively, consistently and clearly, helping users to understand how to access the benefits from the new system.

Additionally, for better uptake, several focus group discussions have also been held with the private sector and qualified professionals - architects, engineers, electricians, farmers, environmental consultants, as well as key players in the construction industry. The building designers have contributed a lot to this development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, policy and legal reforms have also been central to the system's success. Of the six proposed policy changes, most have already been approved. The remaining amendments are expected to be tabled in the next parliamentary session.

The recent reforms do more than enable the system. They drive its uptake by clarifying procedures, removing ambiguity, and making the entire process more predictable for applicants. Clear policies encourage confidence, which is essential for adoption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure strong coordination, the project is guided by a working committee, chaired by the Minister for Trade, supported by dedicated groups on policy, change management, risk and technical delivery. This structure has been instrumental in maintaining momentum, addressing challenges quickly and ensuring that every stakeholder remains engaged and accountable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the need for this reform is clear. Between January and November of 2024, Fiji's Municipal Councils received 2,186 building permit applications valued at F\$1.16 billion. These projects range from homes to hotels and factories, all vital contributors to jobs and growth. Yet, under the current manual process, approvals can be slow and inconsistent. Sir, BPAS intends to address this by providing a single, online, transparent and traceable system. It aims to improve turnaround times, strengthen accountability and make it easier for Fijians to build and invest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by bringing together multiple agencies on a single digital platform, Fiji is breaking down traditional silos and establishing a model of whole-of-Government cooperation rarely seen in the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to sum it all up, BPAS is not only a technological upgrade, but also a transformation in how the Fiji Government serves its people. It builds on the success of SABs, supported by extensive training, better policies and strong governance. Together, these systems make Fiji a leader in digital service delivery in the Pacific, improving transparency, reducing red tape and boosting investor confidence. BIPAD will make the construction process faster, fairer and more efficient - helping Fijians build their homes, helping investors build businesses and helping our nation build its future.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are there any supplementary questions?

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Thank you honourable Prime Minister for the response. Mr.

Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Prime Minister inform Parliament on how the BPAS will benefit ordinary Fijians who are building homes and not just large investors or developers?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in the main response, BPAS will benefit ordinary Fijians who want to build homes, not just the large investors or developers. So, the simple answer to your question is, yes. It will help everyone who wants to build.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I also thank the honourable Prime Minister for his detailed explanation to that question. I know that this project was launched in 2019 under the name of BizFIJI, and it was re-launched under the name of businessNOW but the content remains the same, because the idea is to provide this service online. So, my question is whether all DTCP officers around the country are digitally connected to this programme?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they will all be. At the moment, they are not yet, they will be. Just to give you an indication of what people will see or find when they tune into this, and this is the one of the pages or the front page of what you will see when you hook up to the system.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, probably just an advise to Government from previous experience, this is related to the question raised by honourable Tuinaceva. Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, we had problems previously and this became evident after *TC Winston* and the Categories 4 and 5 cyclones - the role between Rural Local Authority, particularly when it comes to rural areas. The monitoring in rural areas is not that efficient and most of the buildings, including schools, were not built to standard.

My question to the honourable Prime Minister is about the monitoring of building materials. Suppliers have a prominent role in this. We have problems with inferior qualities and this needs to be monitored very well. A perfect example is just pine posts. The honourable Minister for Agriculture is facing serious problems. This also applies to the dairy farmers, but it is not even to standard and the ones that are coming from abroad, I have met engineers who are travelling to go and see from the source, to ensure that materials are to the quality expected. So, the monitoring of the suppliers, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, how will this be catered under the system because this is very, very critical?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a real issue, it is a question that needs to be answered, and all the building suppliers are duty-bound to provide the quality-approved materials for their customers. There is also a system in place where they can be audited and checked, just to make sure that they are compliant with the requirements.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister mentioned about digital presentation and often we have seen in CBD areas the internet issues. My question is, how is the Ministry helping the rural applicants who may not have internet access to use the system effectively?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is perhaps not quite part of this question, but it is something that we will have to logically come to answering. As we roll out the system, connectivity hopefully will also develop in parallel to that development.

Fiji's Container Deposit Regulations
(Question No. 214/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change inform

Parliament on the progress of Fiji's Container Deposit Regulations?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I assure the honourable Member that it is progressing very well. The matter of Fiji's Container Deposit Regulations (CDR) is one of the long-awaited decisive leadership and political will, both of which this Government continues to bring to the table.

The Coalition Government, under the instruction of the honourable Prime Minister himself, during the Global Recycling Day celebration on 18th March, 2024 has placed a renewed priority on finalising implementing the CDR. This is part of a broader shift towards a circular economy, where waste is created as a source rather than a burden. Since March 2024, as I have alluded to, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has revived and accelerated this initiative.

We have met with the eight major beverages companies that proposed a voluntary buy-back scheme. While such voluntary arrangements are commendable, they remain inadequate because national environmental responsibility cannot be optional or left to the goodwill alone. The Ministry has since secured dedicated funding in this financial year, and it is working closely with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to update and strengthen the regulations to modern standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to progress the technical and regulatory framework, the Ministry will soon engage Serious Business, a firm that successfully supported Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Palau in establishing their own container deposit and product stewardship schemes. This work will be funded under the GEF Islands Pacific project, which the Ministry secured through strong international partnership, reflecting renewed confidence in Fiji's environmental leadership. Public and private sector consultation will commence this month, honourable Premila Kumar, including the beverages producers, municipal councils, waste operators and community groups to agree on a fair deposit rate and a pathway to manage legacy waste that has accumulated over the years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once implemented, the Container Deposit Regulation will create a new economic incentive for consumers and return beverages containers, reduce the plastic pollution choking our waterways and coastal lines, promote recycling industries and green jobs, and extend the lifespan of our landfills which are already under pressure. This will replace the limited voluntary return and earn model that currently benefits only a handful of companies.

Under the new regulation, participation and payment of defaults will be mandatory, a level playing field for all. Unlike the past approach, this Government will not allow industry resistance to stall the process any further. My Ministry has made it clear to the importers and those who have large reliance on plastic products to have a moral and legal duty to manage its end-of-life impacts.

The Container Deposit Regulations is just the beginning, and the Ministry is also preparing to expand the stewardship model to other waste streams such as e-waste, used tyres, solar panels, batteries and end-of-life vehicle components, all of which are growing challenges for our small island nation. By addressing these issues through a clear regulatory framework, we move from a take-make-dispose system to one where every product's life cycle is responsibly managed.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, I just got up to thank the honourable Minister for his detailed response. I know it is not an easy task when you are dealing with various beverage companies and there is always this push and pull factor. I recall for the last 20 years, the work had started but we could not see the end of it. I think one of the key issues here is rubbish collection. We do not have a proper system of collecting rubbish around the country. So, the reason why I got up was simply to thank the honourable Minister.

Centralised Disability Data Hub
(Question No. 215/2025)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on measures taken to ensure the effective use of the centralized disability data hub or improved disability reporting including the consolidation of the timelines?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question on measures taken to ensure the effective use of the Centralised Disability Data Hub. The Centralised Disability Data Hub was launched on 29th November, 2024 with the support of Australia-Fiji Vuvale Partnership. To-date, 500 individuals have been assessed and recorded in the system. In addition, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection maintains a digitised database of persons accessing their allowance for persons with disability which now records approximately 13,000 cases.

To ensure co-ordination and effective utilisation of the Data Hub, our Bilateral Disability Inclusion Working Group has been established. This group brings together the five key Fiji organisations of persons with disabilities namely:

- (1) The Fiji Disabled Persons Federation;
- (2) Spinal Injuries Association;
- (3) United Blind Persons Association;
- (4) Psychiatric Survivors Association; and
- (5) Fiji Association of Deaf.

The working group collaborates closely with relevant Government Ministries, Civil Society Organisations and development partners to address funding gaps, enhance data sharing and promote more strategic and efficient approaches to disability inclusion.

In 2023, a scoping study was conducted to review the disability data collection across the Government and Non-Government Agencies and provided key recommendations, including establishment of a central database of disability research under the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD), development of OPD database in partnership with Fiji Disabled Persons Federation and creation of a roadmap for a National Disability Data Hub.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to guide the implementation of these recommendations, a Disability Data Hub Working Group has been established. The technical group has overarching responsibility for the development and operationalisation of Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Priority Area 3.2 of the Fiji National Policy and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which focusses on data and research.

The working group has a draft terms of reference which outlines key objectives that includes providing advice and guidance to Government, organisations of persons with disabilities, disability service providers, research institutions and development partners and disability data priorities, implementation approaches, and risk management strategies.

Guide, review and build upon the development of National Disability Data Hub roadmap and implementation plan to ensure the alignment of the roadmap with national commitments and international obligations, advocate for disability data strengthening and harmonisation at the national level, and to provide oversight, monitoring, and review of the endorsed roadmap for the Disability Data Hub.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support its implementation, the Ministry through the National Council of Persons with Disabilities is looking to recruit a dedicated officer who will manage the data hub and lead engagement with development partners to mobilise funding for sustainability and system enhancement. The long-term plan is to establish a national disability data hub that will serve as a central platform where all disability-related data across Government ministries and agencies can be integrated, harmonised and analysed. This will significantly strengthen evidence-based decision-making, policy formulation and service delivery for persons with disabilities in Fiji.

The data hub working group will also coordinate capacity-building activities, particularly in the use of Washington Group Short Set of Questions already applied by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, which remains the Government's primary collector of disability data. The Ministry reaffirms that data and research is a priority area under the endorsed Fiji national policy on rights of persons with disabilities. The key outcomes of this priority are to ensure the collection of accurate data and research findings to inform inclusive evidence-based policies, programmes and services, and improve the quality of evidence on the lives and needs of persons with disabilities in Fiji, enabling progress to be effectively measured and assessed.

We acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Disaster Risk Management Office for applying the Washington Group Questions in their sectoral data collection. The Ministry continues to work closely with Fiji Bureau of Statistics and the Pacific Community to strengthen analytical capacity and close existing data analysis gaps.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of timeline, the establishment of the disability resource data hub was scheduled for year one, and this milestone has already been achieved with the launch of the OPD data hub. The Ministry's disability resource data hub remains active and is being continuously updated with disability-related publications and data sets to support integrated evidence-based policymaking and reporting.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, thank you very much for that update. The disability data hub is one thing, it is important to get data on anything but at the end of the day, how we make use of it is another thing. This is a substantial group of people who require assistance. What my question is, it is fine to have the data hub, but will the Ministry be pursuing positively and with great impact, taking up this information to the necessary, whether they are architects, whether they are builders, whether they are public transport people, whether it is our own civil servants, will this be taken out to those people to ensure that these particular people are protected because they are supposed to be protected under our Constitution? What we want to know is how positive will be the next steps in getting this particular thing out to those people. I am talking about changing laws, I am talking about buildings, et cetera, and public transport, because they will need our help.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Thank you for the question, honourable Member. You would have seen that we have just launched the National Disability Policy. So, that policy actually works across Government, across sectors to ensure, and in order for that policy to be operationalised well, each of our ministries, each of the sector organisations needs data. So that is where the data comes through.

You would have heard that there is actually a working committee, you mentioned transport, in particular. So, that is one of the subjects in the policy that is actively working in making sure that we are able to get accessible transport, for example. The same thing is being done for health. There is an actual committee that is working with OPDs in trying to see how health becomes accessible. For example, in CWM Hospital, there are health officials who are trained in sign language. So, each sector is working through that national policy, and I am happy to forward that policy to you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think we will move to suspend our proceedings for our break.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before we go on a break, may I get a Ruling on a supplementary question that I promised honourable Koya I would answer.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, you had indicated that you....

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Do I have the option of either tabling it or reading it now?

MR. SPEAKER.- Do you wish it to be heard on the floor or tabled, honourable Koya?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, he is the honourable Prime Minister, I will accept the written one, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister, it will be tabled if you do not mind? So, that is the answer to the question that remained unanswered.

Now, we are going to take a break, and I was going to entertain our suspension motion, given the hour. So, for the purpose of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting time, and I call on the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have the Written Questions and, of course, Schedule 2 – Motions for Debate – the Consolidated Annual Reports as listed.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 3.58 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.53 pm.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable members, just before recess, I had agreed that the response by the honourable Prime Minister to honourable Koya's supplementary question yesterday was to be tabled. Upon further reflection, I now believe that the appropriate, if not the proper form, in the delivery of the response would be by the same way it would have been when the question was asked and, that is, by oral or verbal presentation.

Before we proceed with the other items on the agenda, I would ask, with my apologies to the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Koya, to take back the direction that was made before recess, and I will kindly ask that the response to honourable Koya's supplementary question on Question No. 202 of 2025, be responded to by the honourable Prime Minister, orally.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I respect your ruling on the understanding that there will be no supplementary question to the supplementary question.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the supplementary question was whether Fiji has made any project proposal to access such fund, as the proposal would identify the issues of implementation and inform the World Trade Organization (WTO) of gaps.

I thank the honourable member for his supplementary question, and I would like to inform this august House that Fiji has received assistance from the Government of Canada under the first category of assistance from the Fish Fund. This is currently funding a technical gaps analysis on the implementation of the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. I wish to highlight that the establishment of the Fish Fund itself was a result of strong advocacy and leadership by Fiji as a Small Island Developing State during WTO negotiations. I would also like to, again, thank the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade for his part in those negotiations.

Our consistent call for dedicated support to ensure the effective implementation of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement helped shape the creation of this funding mechanism. As a result, Fiji is proud to be among the first countries to successfully unlock the support under the first category of the Fish Fund.

A validation exercise or GAP analysis, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is scheduled for November this year, to verify and finalise the findings. Once the report is validated, a comprehensive proposal will be developed to support Fiji's submission to access the second category of Fish Fund.

Category 2 Assistance of the Fish Fund aims to address the broader support and capacity building needs for sustainable fisheries management to strengthen members' capacity in science-based fisheries management, stock assessments, data collection and policy development consistent with sustainable practices. Examples include updating fisheries legislation, strengthening monitoring, control and surveillance systems, improving notification and transparency systems, stock assessments, and developing and upgrading the fisheries management database.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we note that Category 1 proposal closed on 9th October of this year, Fiji is prepared to submit its Category 2 proposal in the first quarter of 2026. This presents a strong opportunity for Fiji to advance a Category 2 submission, informed by the outcomes of the ongoing self-assessment and gap analysis. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now move on to our next item which is the Written Questions. We have four Written Questions today.

Written Questions

Full Repair and Maintenance Schedule - Rarawai Mill
(Question No. 216/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the full repair and maintenance schedule for the Rarawai Mill, including the total estimated cost with respect to the following -

- (a) the projected date for the mill's full completion; and
- (b) the definitive timeline for the resumption of milling operations at Rarawai?

¹ HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my written response.

Number of Rural Road Crossings Constructed
(Question No. 217/2025)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament with respect to the following, the –

- (a) number of rural road crossings constructed for the period January 2023 to June 2025;
- (b) number of rural road crossings under construction to date; and
- (c) number of rural road crossings maintained for the period January 2023 to June 2025

² HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my written response.

Expenditure Associated with Independence Day Abroad
(Question No. 218/2025)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises, Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises inform Parliament of the expenditure associated with celebrating Independence Day abroad with respect to the following -

- (a) costs related to the participation of Ministers; and
- (b) costs related to the participation of Prime Minister?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I table the response to the question now, I would also like to highlight the various objections that the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance had raised with similar questions in the past, that we have our opportunity to debate the

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 216/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 217/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure II.

appropriation at the beginning of the Budget year, and we also have the opportunity to comment on the audit reports at the end of the financial year. So, obliging and respecting the wish of the Business³ Committee, I hereby table my response in accordance with the Standing Orders.

Breakdown of Grants Issued to Schools
(Question No. 219/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the number of ECE Centres, primary schools and secondary schools that are yet to receive grants for Terms 1 and 2 for this year and the reason why grants are yet to be released?

⁴ HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my written response.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –
FIJI TEACHERS REGISTRATION AUTHORITY 2020-2023 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports which were tabled on 1st October, 2025.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs Committee noted that the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA) is a statutory body mandated to regulate entry into the teaching profession in Fiji. The FTRA Board is appointed by the Minister for Education, who are representatives of a cross section of the teaching industry, to provide advice and guidance on policy developments and strategic matters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, in its deliberations, highlighted the following recommendations:

- (1) That FTRA must ensure that before undertaking any capital project, they should carry out a scope of work and estimate the cost of the project to prevent overspending.
- (2) That FTRA must collaborate with the Ministry of Education to streamline the process of renewing teachers' licences.
- (3) That FTRA must ensure that teachers who are registered under Limited Authority to Teach Category should complete their degree programme in order to be a fully qualified teacher.
- (4) That FTRA must introduce strict guidelines to ensure that teachers register on time.
- (5) That more funding must be allocated to FTRA to cater for their outreach and support programmes.

³ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 218/2025 tabled by the honourable Prime Minister and Minister For Foreign Affairs, Civil Service, Public Enterprises, Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

⁴ Reply to Written Question No. 219/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure IV.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted that FTRA's Strategic Priority Areas are aligned with national Government priorities and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs looks forward to the implementation and commitment on the recommendations put forward by the Committee.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have a list of speakers with me. Each of the speakers is given seven minutes to give a contribution.

HON. P.D.KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA) is the gatekeeper of teacher quality, and it maintains the integrity of our education system in Fiji. It ensures that only qualified, competent and ethical individuals are allowed to teach our children from early childhood to secondary school. It protects our students, maintains professional standards and helps new teachers make their transition from training to the classroom. The FTRA works closely with teacher training institutions and also registers teacher trainers.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when FTRA fails to perform, the whole education system suffers. What we see today is an institution struggling to live up to its responsibilities, and that failure is having real consequences in our schools and communities.

Our teachers are the backbone of our education system. When the institution that regulates and supports them falters, the effects are felt in every classroom, every community and in every child's learning journey.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know there is a shortage of teachers in critical areas, and this morning, the honourable Minister for Education had highlighted various subjects where we do not have teachers. The report itself admits this shortage, and anyone visiting our schools will see the reality - classroom without teachers or subjects taught by those outside the field.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have teachers who have limited authority to teach, allowing individuals who do not fully meet registration requirements to teach in our schools. We have fully registered secondary school teachers, teaching in primary schools with no primary teaching qualification, and there was this question where we discussed at length. However, what is more concerning, Sir, is the fact that there is a language teacher teaching maths with just one unit. What kind of teaching is happening in the classroom?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this may be a convenient short-term fix, but it sends a dangerous signal that we are willing to lower standards because we cannot manage our teacher workforce properly. When underqualified people are teaching, it is our children who pay the price.

The Report also shows an oversupply of Early Childhood Education teachers while we face shortages in priority subjects. This shows a lack of co-ordination between FTRA, Teacher Training Institutions and the Ministry of Education to ensure the right balance. We cannot have hundreds of ECE graduates without jobs, while critical subjects go unstaffed or ECE teachers are asked to teach in primary schools, who are actually not qualified to teach in primary schools. This is poor planning and poor coordination and FTRA must take some responsibility for this mismatch.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another worrying issue is the non-compliance. The Report reveals that 64 teachers continue to teach without a valid licence. A few years ago, that number was over 500. So, while there has been improvement, it is unacceptable that any unregistered teacher is in our

classroom. If teachers can continue working without valid registration, what does that say about FTRA's authority? Even more concerning, why is the Ministry of Education, the very employer allowing these teachers in schools? Under the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act, the FTRA has the power to fine employers who hire unregistered teachers. So, why is that power not used? Is it because the Ministry itself is the offender?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, registration of teachers is so crucial, just like an unregistered lawyer appearing before the court - unlicensed, unregistered. Similarly, a doctor who is unlicensed, unregistered is carrying out an operation, a surgeon doing that kind of work. Similarly, a teacher must be registered so that all the qualification checks, compatibility standards, everything is maintained in the classroom. Parents have every right to expect that the person teaching their child is qualified and registered. If that basic guarantee fails, confidence in our entire education system begins to crumble.

Another longstanding issue is the outdated Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act. How can FTRA operate effectively when it is still governed by laws written for a different time? The education environment has evolved, technology has advanced, teacher mobility has increased and new challenges like digital learning and overseas recruitment have emerged, yet the Act remains unchanged. The delay in reform is weakening FTRA's ability to enforce standards or respond to today's realities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we look at all these issues together, teacher shortages, weak enforcement, outdated laws and poor coordination a clear picture emerges and the picture is a system that is reactive, fragmented and lacks clear direction. FTRA, instead of being a strong, independent regulator has become a slow-moving bureaucracy, ticking boxes rather than a regulator striving for excellence. I only wish that FTRA can take its role seriously and I think they all need to read the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act to understand what their responsibility is.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all I thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for reviewing this long-outstanding Report that the previous Minister for Education could not provide to the House. We had to make the effort and ask the Executives of FTRA to put in the Annual Report so that they can allow the current management and board to make informed decisions based on the current Annual Report that is produced here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fail to understand the comments made by honourable Premila Kumar because it just shows that they lack planning during their time when the FTRA was formulated, even to the extent when they removed mathematics from the examination. Maybe the next speaker can explain why they introduced another form of mathematics.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Life Maths.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Because Life Maths is not even recognised at university.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Everyone is not going to university.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr Speaker, Sir, that just shows that what she is basically commenting on her misdeeds and maybe at that time, they did not have the time to review, to see, to analyse, to evaluate, to monitor the conditions of teachers, conditions of the subjects that are needed in school, conditions of students, achievements - we are trying to make good of all of these things.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hogwash!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make some comments on the Committee Report and maybe answer to the question that was supposed to be asked by honourable Hem Chand on the online registration of teachers. I think there is online registration for renewal of registration and they can access it through the website that is available.

That is something that the current FTRA is working on to improve, not only to register the already registered teachers, but also for the new registered teachers. So, FTRA is going to invest on the online platform in collaboration with the United Nations Capital Development Fund to implement online pitching registration aimed at improving efficiency, accessibility and service delivery across all divisions in Fiji.

On the other recommendations, the FTRA wish to clarify that there was no instance of overspending as highlighted by the Committee. An allocation of \$50,000 had been approved for office relocation and the proposed monthly rental expenses were not endorsed in the final budget. Consequently, the allocated amount was prudently redirected towards the renovation of the existing office premises.

The second point is, FTRA must collaborate with the Ministry of Education to streamline the process of renewing teachers' licenses as already being alluded to. The available website is there for teachers who are already registered to renew their teacher licenses. Sir, FTRA must ensure teachers who are registered under limited authority to teach category should complete their degree programme in order to be fully qualified teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, teachers are granted limited authority to teach registration only in identified shortage disciplines as in STEM subjects and primary school teaching. Where applicants have not yet completed their formal teaching training qualifications at United Nations Capital Development Fund will be hosted, a cloud-based platform to ensure greater accessibility, efficiency and inclusivity for all teachers in Fiji.

For the introduction of strict guidelines to ensure that teachers register on time, it is an ongoing issue. We are taking actions but once we receive advice from FTRA, we usually give a seven-day notice to the teachers to try and get registered online so that we are in compliance with the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act.

More funding must be allocated to FTRA to cater for their outreach. I thank the Committee for highlighting this and there is a need for FTRA to continue the advocacy programme to increase funding to strengthen awareness, compliance and outreach activity and hopefully this can also be considered in future budgets.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a short contribution on the motion before the House. First of all, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the comprehensive Report. I noted that the Committee has come up with some very good recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority plays a very critical role in ensuring quality education by setting professional standards, verifying qualifications and promoting accountability among educators. By ensuring that teachers meet certain standards, registration helps improve the quality of instruction which directly impacts student learning and achievement.

One of the findings of the Committee is teacher shortages due to migration in certain disciplines and therefore, FTRA have registered teachers under limited authority to teach category, who do not meet the requirements for the full registration process. There are many teachers who fall

under this category and the number may increase in years to come if the current trend continues. This is something which is beyond FTRA's control. I think it is the responsibility of the Ministry to come up with teacher retention strategies to minimise teacher registration. Earlier, I think, I had given a few suggestions as to how teacher retention strategies can work and what were some of the strategies that can be used by the Ministry of Education to retain teachers.

One strategy that I mentioned, and I will continue to say is, the salary upgrade of the teachers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the functions of FTRA is to collaborate with employing authorities and teacher education institutions in relation to standards of courses of teacher education acceptable for the purpose of full teacher registration and renewal. This is an area where FTRA must strengthen. FTRA should collaborate with the Ministry of Education to address the issue and assist and guide teachers to upgrade qualifications so that these teachers can get full registration.

Another finding of the Committee is that FTRA deregistered 64 teachers who were still teaching without renewing their teaching licences - FTRA lacks proper coordination of the teacher registration process in rural and maritime areas. These 64 teachers were teaching without valid registration, and I think this is something that the Ministry of Education should work very closely with FTRA on, so that in future, teachers are not in classrooms if they do not have the valid registration.

Most of these deregistered teachers are from rural and maritime schools and it is difficult for them to travel to Suva to renew their registration. That is the very reason why I raised this in Parliament earlier on that FTRA should come up with strategies so that teachers do not have to travel all the way from the outer islands to Suva during teaching days, they can do their registration online and even pay from a distance. There are many teachers teaching in rural and maritime schools, and it is high time FTRA should have offices nearby so that teachers do not have to travel to Suva to renew their registration. FTRA should improve in its operation.

Legal penalties for employing unregistered teachers are steep, with fines up to \$150,000 but, enforcement is complicated when the Ministry of Education itself is the primary employer. This exposes a loophole in the system and undermines accountability. The presence of deregistered teachers in classrooms raises serious questions about students' safety and the Ministry's oversight. Under the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act they have the power to even fine the employer who employs unregistered teachers. If this is in the Act, it should be enforced.

The other recommendation of the Committee is that FTRA lacks the proper coordination of teacher registration. I fully support the Committee's recommendation. There are many teachers who are registered and yet, to receive their ID cards and I had raised this in Parliament earlier on. Teachers pay for their registration and once they are registered, they should be issued with ID cards. The current procedure is that teachers write and request for ID cards and I want to know the reason. It should be an automatic process, that is, once registration fee is paid by the teachers, they should be issued with a registration certificate together with their ID cards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FTRA has many important functions and powers. I urge the honourable Minister responsible to ensure that FTRA works in accordance with the Act to promote the teaching profession, to develop, formulate and improve professional teaching standards to the needs of students and of a professional workforce, and develop, formulate and maintain a code of professional ethics for the teaching profession. If FTRA fails, the quality of education will be compromised. FTRA has to ensure that well-qualified teachers with valid teacher registration are in classrooms.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to contribute to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Annual Reports 2020-2021,

2021-2022 and 2022-2023 financial years. This critical Report laid before this House by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs demands a transparent and constructive response from this Government regarding the standards and stability of our teaching profession.

Before I address the finer details of this Report, permit me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to speak not just as an Assistant Minister or Member of Parliament, but as a former member of the teaching profession. I spent years in the classroom. I stood where our teachers stand today, and I understand intimately the challenges, the sacrifices and the sheer dedication that underpins our education system. This Report is therefore personal, and it strengthens my resolve to ensure that our teachers, my former colleagues have a professional framework that respects and supports their vital work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Authority's fundamental mandate is to uphold quality education as per SDG 4. While the FTRA has demonstrated resilience in adapting its operations digitally, the Report exposes profound challenges that require our immediate and collective focus.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the data on teacher migration is stark, revealing the exodus of talent that has severely strained our educational infrastructure. The loss of over 1,000 fully registered teachers post-COVID is not merely an administrative statistic, it is a national human resource crisis. This vacuum has necessitated the emergency use of limited authority to teach categories to fill urgent gaps in critical subjects like Maths, Physics and Computer Science.

The Government is treating this not as a burden, but as an opportunity for strategic investment. We wholeheartedly support Recommendation 4.4 and are committing to an unprecedented initiative through the Ministry of Education to ensure every single limited authority teacher completes their formal qualification within the four-year grace period. We are eliminating the historical challenges, the lack of connectivity, the inability to access tertiary programmes by delivering support directly to those serving in the remote and maritime heartland of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee's finding that 64 deregistered teachers remained in the system without a valid licence is a severe integrity issue. It is a fundamental breach of trust in our regulatory framework, and it raises serious questions about accountability.

The Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act 2008 sets a precedent which fines up to F\$150,000 for employing unregistered teachers. When the employer is the Government itself, we must acknowledge the structural loophole. This Government is taking decisive actions to close it. We are fully committed to implementing Recommendation 4.5 by forging an iron-thread compliance mandate between the FTRA and the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, the strong support for the review of the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority Act 2008 as per Recommendation 4.8 is a pledge to this House. We will deliver a modernised legal framework that provides clear, unambiguous and enforceable pathways for compliance, ensuring that every teacher in every classroom is legally registered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, digital transition is the pathway to equity. While we commend the FTRA for its United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) partnership, the hurdles of digital literacy and inconsistent internet connectivity in rural areas cannot be ignored.

The Government is committed to deploying the required funding, supporting the spirit of Recommendation 4.9. This investment will be specifically channelled, as outlined in Recommendation 4.6, to provide the infrastructure and training necessary to ensure that our dedicated teachers in the most remote areas can renew their licences, access professional development and participate fully in the digital future of Fijian education. No teacher will be left behind

due to geography or lack of connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Consolidated Review Report serves as our urgent blueprint for action. This Government is confronting the structural challenges of talent loss and regulatory enforcement with transparency and strategic investment. We are building a stronger, more resilient and more equitable teaching profession that Fiji deserves.

I commend the FTRA for its work and I urge this House to support the Committee's forward-looking recommendations as a collective roadmap for further enhancing the quality and integrity of the teaching profession in Fiji. I commend this Report to the House.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the constructive contribution of honourable Members during the debate on this Consolidated Review Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank the Board members, Executive Management and staff of the FTRA for their commitment, dedication and unwavering support which have been instrumental in the successful operation of FTRA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I humbly request FTRA and the Ministry of Education on the successful implementation of the recommendations put forward by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity. I commend this motion before the House.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT – FIJI BROADCASTING CORPORATION LTD 2018-2023 ANNUAL REPORTS

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports, which were tabled on 1st October, 2025.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee recognises the integral role of the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation Limited (FBCL) as it plays a vital role not only in the dissemination of information and public awareness, but also as an active participant in the nation's economic landscape.

The media and communications sector has a growing influence on national development, and FBCL's operations contribute significantly to employment creation, local content production, advertising revenue, and digital transformation within Fiji's economy.

The Committee recommends that FBCL restructures their reporting style to present

information much more clearly for its specific financial year. Additionally, the Committee recommends that any supporting documentation, including the historical development of FBCL, should be annexed to the report's ways of reference.

The Committee also recommends that FBCL should provide information on projects, programmes and technological advancements for each financial year to keep stakeholders informed about the organisation's progress and innovation. Without this information, stakeholders cannot clearly understand the organisation's activities or its strategic direction.

The Committee concludes that from 2018 to 2023, FBCL has demonstrated a steady growth and innovation, while remaining steadfast in adhering to the values of respect, transparency and integrity. The FBCL recognises its responsibility to uphold the highest ethical standards in all its operations, ensuring it serves its customers, clients and communities with excellence and accountability.

The Committee suggests that FBCL carefully consider these findings to support continuous improvement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for the debate on the motion. I have a list of six speakers with me, each is granted five minutes to deliver his or her speech.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the recommendations made by the Standing Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBCL has made remarkable progress in recent years, despite earlier politically motivated attacks from the Government side to discredit them. Those criticisms have now stopped, a clear sign that the Government has realised that its own narrative was false.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Public Enterprises Act 2019, FBCL is required to operate on a commercial basis, and like any other public enterprise, generate returns for its shareholders - the people of Fiji. However, the law also recognises that when a public enterprise is asked to deliver essential national services that are not commercially viable, like shipping to remote islands or airline routes that private companies will not fly, the Government must step in and subsidise those services.

The same principle applies to public broadcasting. We all know that private radio and TV stations focus only on profitable markets, mainly urban areas, but FBCL goes further, Mr Speaker, Sir. Yet, despite doing \$22 million worth of work each year, the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) fee that FBCL receives from the Government is much less than the real value of the service it provides. Actually, they have been receiving \$11 million, and over the last couple of years, that amount has come down; that is from 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the leadership of Mr. Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, former Chief Executive Officer of FBCL, he has taken FBCL to new heights. The entire FBCL building was renovated and modernised, transforming the organisation into a hybrid broadcaster with three television channels and six radio stations modelled on Sky New Zealand.

Just like any business, FBCL took a loan of \$21 million from the Fiji Development Bank at an interest rate of 12 percent to modernise and upgrade facilities and bring innovation to better serve the nation. During this time, FBCL launched the region's first free-to-air 24-hour sports channel, established a state-of-the-art in-house production studio, and created a dedicated Events Management Team.

The AM transmitters were also upgraded, extending coverage to even the most remote parts of the country, covering nearly 100 percent of our people. That is not just service delivery, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is nation-building.

Mr. Speaker, forward-looking plans were put in place to establish a disaster risk resilience centre and an international standard broadcasting facility for international sports. This was achieved - the latter one was achieved in 2023. The whole idea was to strengthen FBCL towards a self-sustaining financial model. These transformations ensured that FBC was not just a broadcaster, it was a national communications network, serving the people in times of need, especially during natural disasters and during COVID-19.

However, instead of acknowledging this success, this Government chose to attack FBCL.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- They misled the public by calling the PSB fee a grant, as if it was some sort of Government handout.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not just misleading; it shows a lack of understanding of how public enterprises operate under the law and how they should be reported under the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when this Government finds itself in charge, we see a quiet change in tone. They no longer call the PSB fee a grant; they now correctly describe it as revenue in their books because they finally recognise that the FBCL is providing a paid public service. This is effectively an admission that their earlier attacks were purely political, designed to undermine and discredit the leadership of FBCL.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of vilifying its past leadership, we should acknowledge the extraordinary work that FBCL has done, to modernise broadcasting and to ensure that every Fijian, whether in the city, in the highlands or in the maritime islands, have access to reliable information.

I sincerely thank the former and the current FBCL Management Team and staff for serving the nation and for building FBCL as a trusted broadcaster.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to contribute to the debate on the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs' Consolidated Review Report on FBC. We were a part of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs at that time, honourable Tuisawau and myself, when we scrutinised FBCL. It was surprising at the time when that grant became revenue. We questioned that because other television stations or communication companies did not have that advantage. It has been adopted, and it is now part of the income for FBCL, but that helped FBC quite significantly to where it is today.

With that, as it may, Mr. Speaker, it is here today and it is a broadcaster, it is a lifeline for information, education and cultural identity, with a proud history that goes back to 1954.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, speak on the findings and the recommendations in the Report. On 4.3 and 4.4 of the Findings, it says, and I quote:

“4.3 The Committee noted the report failed to highlight new projects, local programming initiatives...

- 4.4 The Committee expressed concern that since 2021, FBC has not conducted a “viewership and listening survey” to assess the effectiveness of its radio and television programs.”

I highlighted those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because there is a huge disconnect here, within our community, the leadership of the general populace. We do not seem to be getting across to our people. We need to communicate more effectively, and it is not only with our administration.

I always remember the former Prime Minister would be talking on the radio about doing the right thing with your rubbish, and if you are following a bus, what will fly out of the bus? I know the radio was also playing in the bus. Here was the Prime Minister talking about doing the right thing, but things are flying out of the bus. You know what it is like, the corn.

I like what the Committee said here, that there is going to be local programme initiatives and they are going to do a viewership or listening survey on what connects us to the people. Can we be creative in getting the messaging across?

I would challenge the Management, going forward, to be more creative so that what we want as leaders, as people in this House - the legislature, the executive branch, and the way we want our country to develop, must resonate with our people out there in the community.

When I used to sit on the other side of the House, we debated this, and I remembered that I brought up a case of that *Bill Cosby Show*. I know, I was here on this side of the House, they shot me down saying, “How can you bring up a name like that, this guy is in serious disrepute.” The *Bill Cosby Show* ran for about eight years from 1984 to 1992, and America would come to a standstill during that programme. It was so popular. Quite a number of Black Americans have said that they went to university because of the influence of the *Bill Cosby Show*.

I am just challenging the FBC leadership, can you do something more creative to get the message across? Can we have a local sitcom? We have creative people now and just capture the whole of Fiji at a certain hour during the day so that the message can come across in images as they did with the *Bill Cosby Show*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I like this recommendation. I think it is time that we challenge FBCL. Their reach is the broadest in this country. I would just challenge them to do something more creative to get the messaging across. We have headlines everyday - HIV, drugs, and right now, the media is against me on something I said, but this is a beautiful country - Fiji. I am a tourism person, the hotels are full, the airlines are full, flying into Fiji, yet the headlines are saying, “HIV, drugs, et cetera.” So, I said to them the other day, “Can you say something more positive because you are not doing justice to this country?”

From tourism, it is a beautiful country, and it has a lot going for it. Right now, I am not the media’s favourite parliamentarian. They are shooting me down, saying, “Do not shoot the messenger”. These are things that we need to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to change the conversation and highlight more positive things about this country and connect with our people.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report confirms that FBCL’s status is at a critical national stage and a commercially efficient enterprise. The Corporation demonstrated a commendable financial discipline notably by settling a substantial \$21 million infrastructure loan three years ahead of its schedule in 2021. It successfully operates a hybrid model, balancing commercial operations with the

vital Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) services.

Critically, the FBCL maintains the nation's only AM radio service, which provides unlimited technological reach, covering virtually 100 percent of the Fijian population, unnecessary functions, particularly during natural disasters. These are achievements that deserve our acknowledgment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beneath this veneer of corporate success, the FBCL has committed a significant failure of its core mandate, a failure that directly impacts the citizens we represent. I speak specifically on the growing frustration among our Hindustani-speaking constituents, who rely on FBCL for cultural and entertainment programming, such as popular series. The discontinuation or severe reduction of this core Hindi content for those who rely on broadcast at home is not a minor programming tweak; it is a profound erosion on FBCL's commitment to linguistic and cultural diversity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBCL operates two dedicated Hindustani radio stations - Radio Fiji 2 and Mirchi FM. The fee under the PSB contract is paid precisely for the production and broadcast of local radio and TV programmes that are beneficial to all Fijians. I call on the FBCL leadership to address this as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBCL is not merely a commercial company, it is a public enterprise governed, by the Public Enterprises Act 2019. This Act imposes a deliberate and dual mandate on FBCL.

Firstly, the law dictates that the primary objective of a public enterprise is to be a very successful business. We accept this - FBCL must seek profit and self-sustainability.

Secondly, however, the law mandates that FBCL must fulfil its non-commercial obligations. These are the public service duties that are costly but necessary for national development. This includes maintaining the costly infrastructure, providing free to air time for public service announcements valued at approximately \$800,000 annually, and ensuring comprehensive multilingual programming.

The law is clear. The Government pays the PSB fees to compensate FBCL for performing these non-commercial duties. The FBCL itself values the total public airtime it provides - \$22 million annually, yet the PSB fee provided by the Government decreased by 85 percent between 2018 and 2023.

With the compensation, public service falls short by millions. When the law requiring full compensation is effectively ignored, the commercial arm is forced to cross-subsidise the public mandate. This creates a powerful structural incentive to cut costs in the easiest places, which regrettably means cost-cutting important series of complex local production, therefore, failing our cultural commitment to the diverse audiences.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the heart of FBCL's failure lies not in its content choices but in a systematic refusal to comply with mandatory governance requirements, therefore, escaping accountability to this House and the Fijian people.

The Committee's findings are damning indictment of this lack of transparency, such as:

- (1) Missing measurable performance, that is, KPIs;
- (2) Missing audience data; and

(3) Missing national development alignment that includes SDGs and gender.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBCL is at a crossroad. Its operational strengths are undermined by institutional capacity. The new funding environment which sees the PSB grant open to competition means FBCL must compete on merit, not just on tradition.

I call upon the leadership of FBCL to immediately and fully implement all recommendations set forth by the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. Specifically, FBCL must institutionalise the reporting of performance matrix, that is, KPIs, in all future reports, comply with mandatory requirements to report on Sustainable Development Goals and include comprehensive gender analysis.

With that, Sir, I support the motion before the House.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for the preparation of this Consolidated Review Report on the 2018 to 2023 Annual Reports of the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation. The Committee has recommended that FBC restructures its reporting style. The Committee's recommendation is noted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, FBC will endeavour to incorporate additional requirements in its next annual report being for the financial year 2024. The FBC will ensure that the preparation and finalisation of its annual report is undertaken in close consultation with its Chairman and Board of Directors, and in compliance with its legislation and other policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Corporation remains committed to maintaining the highest standards of reporting to Parliament. Lessons and trends from 2018 to 2023 period will guide the 2024 report, reflecting continued improvements in governance, financial management and operational planning. The inclusion of annexed historical information will further strengthen transparency, accountability and ease of reference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee also recommends FBC to include performance metrics aligned to its KPIs which are closely linked to its Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) obligation on focusing on service coverage, financial efficiency and audience engagement. As highlighted in the 2023 Annual Report, FBC achieved 100 percent national radio coverage through the AM transmission project, implemented a 40 percent reduction in PSB fees to enhance cost efficiency hence invested \$7.55 million in capital development to strengthen operational performance and service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBC has incorporated its departmental KPIs and its business plans into its three-year strategic planning document, which forms the foundation for the development of the corresponding three-year Annual Corporate Plan. These documents ensure that the operational objectives remain closely aligned with the strategic priorities.

The Committee has also recommended that FBC provides information on projects, programmes and technological advancements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBC's audited financial statements include detailed disclosures under notes showing the amounts of capital expenditure approved and committed by the board. These disclosures are verified annually by external auditors to ensure good governance and accountability.

Technological plans, digital upgrades and other major projects are captured within the technology department annual business plans and are integrated into the Corporation's strategic planning framework. Sir, the FBC will further enhance that these disclosures are in the next annual

report to strengthen transparency and provide a clear overview of progress and strategic direction.

The Committee also recommended that FBC should conduct annual viewership and listenership survey - FBC confirmed that the survey on viewership and listenership were conducted during the pre-COVID years and again in 2021. These surveys provided valuable insights into audience strengths and engagement levels across radio and television platforms. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, another round of survey is scheduled in line with FBC's strategic planning cycle. The Corporation has assured that it will update the Committee on the progress of these surveys.

It may be also prudent that I highlight a few more operational matters regarding FBC. The Corporation continues to fulfil its public service mandate by providing accessible information, education and entertainment to all Fijians. Sir, FBC remains one of Fiji's key public enterprises, operating six radio stations and three television channels in *iTaukei*, Hindustani and English. Through its Public Service Broadcasting framework, FBC ensures that all citizens, including those in the remote and maritime areas have access to timely and essential information, particularly during national emergencies.

Despite financial pressures, FBC has demonstrated resilience. In 2024, the Corporation achieved a net profit of \$555,000, maintaining profitability even with 44 percent reduction in PSB funding. Total revenue reached was \$15.9 million, while shareholder's equity increased to \$35.3 million. This reflects prudent financial management. Over the years, FBC has reduced its reliance on Government's PSB funding from 42.6 percent in 2018 to 39.4 percent currently, while expanding commercial and digital income streams, highlighting its commitment to financial stability and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBC has also implemented strategic initiatives to enhance operational capacity and digital transformation. This includes updating outside broadcasting systems for live coverage of major sports and national events, establishing a digital product division to generate revenue through OTT, pay-per-view and digital marketing services, expanding VITI+ streaming platforms alongside testing the SERE+ application.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nand, can I interrupt? I hope you are winding down.

HON. S. NAND.- I am about to. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FM Upgrade Project and Disaster Relief Facility, supported by US\$1.7 million grant from the Korean government will strengthen national coverage and disaster preparedness. Sir, FBC remains committed to improving financial management, service delivery and technological capabilities. The Government acknowledges the board, management and staff for their continued dedication in ensuring FBC fulfils the national mandate while adapting to the evolving media landscape.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Alvick Maharaj, you keep to your five minutes, please.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I was expecting extra two minutes.

I rise to speak on this particular motion. The findings and recommendations of this Report, while necessary, exposes fundamental hypocrisy at the heart of this new Government's financial management and its supposed commitment to integrity. The history of Fijian Broadcasting Corporation, government funding the Public Service Broadcasting allocation is a well-known financial controversy.

For years, the previous government was accused too much of these losses and painted a false picture of commercial success. The previous government was tagged in engaging in devious

accounting manoeuvre when reclassification of the government funding from grant to Public Service Broadcasting fee or revenue was done. This move was done to comply with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) specifically IAS 20 and was not a political plot.

HON. J. USAMATE.- There you go!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The Opposition then condemned this practice as financial engineering, using the government subsidy as revenue to create an illusion of profitability. Moreover, one brother assisting his brother to justify his position as CEO with huge profits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBC has evolved over a number of years. As one would recall, the first Hindi TV show, *Yahan Main Ghar Ghar Kheli* was most popular amongst every household, even in non-Hindi speaking households, and also showcasing all Sevens Games and not just a selective of Fiji's games.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the grant issue was used as a campaign tool by this Government and the current FBC management they appointed. When in Opposition many of you argued that the PSB funding should be a non-revenue grant to the organisation or at best, not a commercial fee to truly reflect the company's financial state. You promised a return to physical transparency, yet what do the latest financial reports for this new administration show?

- (1) They continue to treat funding as an income despite reducing the PSB funding as part of the new policy direction, the remaining allocation is still classified and recorded as revenue in the statement of profit and loss.
- (2) They used the classification for political gain. The new management proudly triumphed that even with a significant reduction in PSB fee foregoing 40 percent chunk of the previous allocation, they were still able to report profit of \$555,000 for year 2024. They declared this as a milestone achievement using grant as a revenue which they opposed.
- (3) The decrease in the reduction of 40 percent was seen as a handout to other mainstream media and commercially viable companies. We sincerely hope that the new Minister of Finance will closely scrutinise the distribution of taxpayers' money to such organisations, while new entrepreneurs such as Duavata News, RonCast, Apna North FM, et cetera who are running their platforms on social media continue to struggle, while the fully established multimillion companies are funded in millions to run government propaganda.
- (4) I wonder which classification is used to provide funding to these commercially viable media companies. If it is grant, then why are we providing these companies with a grant? Are these companies treating grant from the government as a fee or grant in their financial statements? If it is a fee, why are we paying fees when this Government was totally against fee and always said that it should be considered as a grant. What a hypocrisy this Government has trapped itself in. This is what happens when you say things to form the Government and later realise that the system you were opposing is the same system they you have to use to govern now.
- (5) While the Media Industry Development Act has been repealed to give more freedom of speech, it has been seen as suppression to the voice of the Opposition, the voice of the people and we hardly see Opposition Members being covered in the mainstream media especially by FBC. The FBC publishes what they want to publish or follow the directive of the funder. For example, before speaking, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I went to their website. For Parliament itself, they had published 11 news since yesterday. None of them were from the

Opposition, all from Government. This is the suppression of the Opposition. This is what FBC is doing under the current CEO. I demand the CEO to resign because he is not meeting the standard set by the media industry, and this is what they call balance reporting. Nothing about Opposition or what the Opposition say.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the height of hypocrisy the Government and FBC's new management are using, the very same accounting methodology treating the government allocation as income and they strongly opposed this when it was implemented by the previous government. They wanted to convert the funding back to true grant or form of capital injection that does not inflate operating profit, but FBC continues to treat the funds as income in the financial report.

Why? To paint a good picture of the new management, to boast of a profit and perpetuate the very same financial illusion you once called a scandal. The fact is, this Government opposed the move from grant to revenue and now they are doing the same thing as the previous government did. They criticised the painting, but they used the same brush and the same paint to create their own portrait of financial success.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, where is the real reform? Where is the courage to restructure the FBC funding to truly reflect its mandate as a Public Service Broadcaster rather than a commercially self-sustaining entity? We, in the Opposition maintain a true financial integrity which requires more than just changing the guard, not just the logo, it requires changing the rules. This Government has failed the test.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while I commend the Report before the House, I still demand the resignation of the CEO.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought for a while I will have a bit of rest, but I need to speak on this. Let me begin by first reminding honourable colleagues in the Opposition that when they talk about financial integrity, transparency and accountability, just look at the Report we are looking at - 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 Reports. This is precisely what they were using FBC for the entire term that they were in government, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is this Government that decided to remove the draconian Media Decree and that provided FBC the freedom.

I was in Opposition for eight years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and never once FBC had a story from the Opposition attacking the Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Now you see there is freedom, accountability and that is why FBC is doing well. Business thrives in an atmosphere of freedom. Look at what the CEO has done. It is actually quite insulting for honourable Maharaj to call for the resignation of a CEO who is qualified and experienced, not only journalist, but also a good financial CEO and Manager. The freedom that we have provided allows the company to get more advertisements and business. In fact, they have diversified the number of programmes that they are now offering. Honourable Kumar talked about extending the reach of FBC but look at the amount of money that they spent, Mr.

Speaker, Sir, to do exactly what could have been done at half the cost. This is precisely what we are saying and that is why they were not bringing annual reports and audited reports into Parliament.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.— Now we are bringing that and you should be thankful to the Government that we have provided that. We have brought a level playing field in the media.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.— Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.— We are not hounding *The Fiji Times*. We are not hounding *Fiji Sun*.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.— For years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, their government because they did not like *The Fiji Times*, they refused to advertise in *The Fiji Times*. We did not do that. *Fiji Sun* was one of the most draconian newspapers during their term, attacking the Opposition on a daily basis, concocting stories, in fact we sued them and won the case.

We, as a government, have kept the level playing field, we are providing advertisements to *Fiji Sun*, we are providing Public Service Grants and that is true media freedom in this country. That allows companies like FBC to thrive.

I want to commend the CEO, all the news editors and reporters. They feel free today for doing such a good job in making sure that our people are well informed in a balanced way, in an unbiased way, and in an efficient and effective way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noted the comments that have been made by honourable Members and we all agree that FBC has made some considerable progress over the years. There was some messaging issue that was raised by honourable Gavoka on the disconnection in messaging. I think this is a major problem also in the country. FBC has just completed a shooting session for a local drama to highlight some of these local issues.

On the Public Service Broadcasting fee that has also been highlighted, FBC has gone down from 70 percent to 35 percent, and they have also provided a lot of services to other events such as Fiji Day, Ratu Sukuna Day, et cetera. Of course, their new digital framework, VITI+, is quite popular where people from overseas are able to access events that are being aired locally, and they are paying it for a fee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all the honourable Members for their comments, and I do support another motion before the House.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE
ELECTORAL COMMISSION 2020-2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Electoral Commission Annual Reports, which were tabled on 1st October, 2025.

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

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament; as the Member moving the motion, I rise to make a short contribution on the Consolidated Review Report of the Electoral Commission 2020 to 2022 Annual Reports.

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Commission is established under Section 75 of the 2013 Constitution and is responsible for the following:

- (1) Registration of voters;
- (2) Registration of political parties;
- (3) Determination of the number of Members of Parliament;
- (4) Receipt and return of the Writ of an election;
- (5) Declaration of the election results and the allocation of seats in Parliament;
- (6) Adjudication of electoral disputes, including disputes relating to or arising from the right to be nominated as a candidate, but excluding petitions and disputes subsequent to the declaration of election results; and
- (7) Monitoring and enforcing compliance with this decree and any law governing political parties.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee thoroughly reviewed the Annual Reports and identified a few pertinent issues. Most of these issues were addressed and clarified by the Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office.

Some of the key findings, Mr. Speaker, that were noted by the Committee are as follows:

- (1) Low voter turnout transpired in the 2022 General Elections and factors that contributed to it.
- (2) Strategies used by the Fijian Elections Office in order to improve voter turnout and the reduced number of invalid votes cast in the next general elections.
- (3) Non-inclusion of Financial Statement in the Electoral Commission's Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, I will now go straight into the recommendations put forth by the Committee for the consideration of the House, which includes the following:

- (1) That the FEO incorporates ethnicity data into its system, to better understand voter demographics.
- (2) That FEO strengthens its internal mechanisms to ensure accuracy of voter registration database.
- (3) That the targetted voter registration initiatives be developed to support tertiary students residing outside their home constituencies.

- (4) That electoral laws be amended to strengthen voter education on proper ballot marking with the aim of reducing the number of invalid votes in future general elections.
- (5) That a system be developed to facilitate the collaboration between the Births, Deaths and Marriages Office (BDMO) and the Fijian Elections Office, enabling automatic updates to the national voter registration.
- (6) That future Annual Reports of the Electoral Commission include audited financial statements to enable Standing Committees to provide full oversight.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I thank you for your indulgence and I commend the Report to Parliament for debate. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honorable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, and I have a list of seven speakers with me. Each one will be given six minutes. I will now first call on the Acting Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, honourable Members of Parliament, and those tuning in from across the globe; *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate tabled by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, having completed the consolidated review of the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports of the Electoral Commission.

I would also like to acknowledge my appreciation for the well articulated Report and I encourage each one of us to read the Report, identify the gaps, because from this side of the House, we are going to address the gaps.

On the first recommendation, there is a need for the Fijian Elections Office (FEO) to incorporate ethnicity data into the system in order to better target its strategies to address low voter turnout. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to advise that the Electoral Commission and the FEO have noted this and will ensure that we capture the elite data in future reports.

For some strange reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a multicultural country, someone thought that it is best to take out ethnicity. It is a very basic thing. When you take that out, you basically miss the information that can be processed in terms of the policies. This side of the Government is committed to address that.

On the recommendation that the FEO develops and implements targeted voter registration initiatives for tertiary students residing outside their home constituencies, such as special registration drives, temporary transfer options, or mobile polling stations near campuses, to ensure their inclusion and participation in future elections.

The Electoral Commission and the FEO will ensure that this is addressed going forward, so that this situation is not repeated. It is common sense, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They must be provided the right to vote.

I just returned from New Zealand. What was saddening, Mr. Speaker, for those who participated in the ballot, they received their ballot papers one day or on the day of the election. Some of them received the ballot paper, but there was empty, nothing written on it. How can you deny university students the right to vote? It is common sense. However, as I have said, these are issues that will be addressed, and we promised this before the election, and we will implement it.

On the recommendation that the Commission include its financial statement in the next annual report to provide Parliament with a comprehensive review of the Electoral Commission's annual performance. The Committee noted that the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), is required by law to include its audited accounts with its Annual Report as per section 25(3)(d) of the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Act 2012.

The Committee commends the FCCC for setting a positive precedent by mandating audited reports to Parliament and further recommends that this practice is necessary for all Independent Commissions to adopt, including the Electoral Commission. If the Electoral Commission is funded by Government, it is only right that they provide their Annual Report to this House, just like Fiji Airways and every other. Why they have not, it is beyond me, Sir. I am advising the previous formats of Annual Reports do normally not include the financial statements and I assure this august House, future reports will include financial statements, although it might not be the final audited accounts.

On the recommendation that the Commission continues with its voter education initiatives and identifies strategies to boost voter turnout by addressing misconceptions and strengthen public awareness of the voting process, this was an area of distrust that lacked public trust, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because of the manner in which registration was taken.

I am pleased to advise that the Commission and the FEO have completed awareness and electoral services, as outlined below:

- (1) From September 24th to 26th October, the FEO visited Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and ACT.
- (2) From 27th September to 2nd October, the FEO visited Tuvalu.
- (3) 5th October to 18th October, they visited New Zealand.
- (4) 8th October to 10th October, they visited Samoa.
- (5) 11th October to 14th October, they visited American Samoa.
- (6) 19th October and 21st October, they visited Cook College.
- (7) I was advised that at least there were about 3,000 people living in Cook Islands.
- (8) 27th October and 13th November, a team from the FEO will be visiting the USA, to California, Seattle, Washington, D.C. and New York. A large Fijian diaspora now resides in USA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, visits to Australia were coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Employment. A total of 1,500 Fijian diaspora were assisted.

The Committee recommended amending the electoral laws to clarify and improve understanding of voting procedures, particularly the perception around ballot marking to reduce invalid votes cast by voters.

I am pleased to advise this august House that the Fatiaki Report and the amendment to the electoral legislation have been completed and our office is encouraged to support the draft Bills and regulations.

The report on the draft Bills have been vetted by our office and upon completion of all legal processes, the honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet will make necessary proposals and the provisions for next steps for tabling Bills and the report.

On the recommendation of the system be developed to enable the BDMO and FEO to collaborate to update the national voter registration so that deceased citizens are automatically removed from the national voter registration and those who have reached 18 years be flagged to the FEO for registration and update in the national voter registration. I am advising this august House that the FEO will pursue this, whilst also acknowledging that there will still be a need for manual confirmation, especially for people sharing the same names.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these recommendations are well accepted, and the Electoral Commission and FEO committed to build greater transparency, inclusiveness and confidence in the Fijian electoral system and so that every eligible Fijian has equitable access to the right to vote.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the tabled Consolidated Review Report on the 2020-2022 Electoral Commission Annual Reports.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House. I am just enlightened on two of the recommendations and I would like to shed some light.

Indeed, there was a decline in voter turnout in the 2014 Elections up to 2022, but my focus area I would like to talk on is that the Committee noted that the voter participation for women in the general elections improved from 2018 to 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, women's participation in elections and in Parliament is not just a favour granted by the fortunate, it is a fundamental right and a fundamental duty. When women vote, policies reflect caregiving, education, health, safety and opportunity - areas that touch every home, every child and every dream.

Yet we know that the path is not always smooth. Barriers such as legal, cultural and economic try to dim the light of women's leadership. We all talk about women having a seat in Parliament, but have we created an environment where women feel empowered and safe to be candidates of a political party, or to fight in elections and be open to scrutiny or personal criticism or attacks?

Many times, Mr. Speaker, Sir, her character gets questioned. It is an entertainment on social media for the many. Not many can bear the level of pressure and criticism at the same time, I expect it to keep their sanity and remain focussed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the young girls who dreams of Parliament, your voice is not distant or impractical - it is essential, legitimate and indispensable. To the mother balancing work and family, you have carried experience, expertise and resilience through every challenge and your seat is not a symbol, it is a tool designed to craft policies that heal, empower and unite.

I call on all men in our society - fathers, brothers and husbands to stand with the women in their households but by not only sharing in their housework or family planning but to actively support their pursuit of leadership across all institutions, including being a parliamentarian. Yet, I note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that empowerment is not about big positions, high salary, high-risk jobs, being subject to national scrutiny, et cetera, but empowerment is about being content with where and what you are in life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second point I would like to highlight on is the electoral App. While the Fiji Government is going digital across many Ministries and institutions, the Fijian Elections Office seems to be going backwards. Millions were spent to establish the elections App. Glitches are common in all software and hardware.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when Parliament had the upgrade and when we went live, these electronics had shown some issues which was attended to immediately and sometimes, when you upgrade your phone, it starts to heat up or slow down. It is an electronic device. It will have glitches and it will have issues. So, I strongly disagree on the removal of the elections App. What is there to hide? They talked about public trust and transparency on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Elections Office needs to ensure transparency so that the public can track how results are generated, reported and verified. It reduces room for doubt and suspicion about the integrity of the election process.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us commit to a future where participation is universal and where every vote contributes to governance and serves us all. Let us pledge to remove obstacles to amplify voices and to celebrate the leadership that Fijians bring to the halls of power and to the life of the nation.

I would like to note that being a parliamentarian is not about titles and suits, it is about leadership, it is about being a problem solver, having a balance of intellect, compassion, and a heart that is for every Fijian's prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, it was absolutely shameful and disheartening to see how the honourable Minister for Sugar spoke to the farmer in Ba which was circulating on social media. I believe an elected Member must know how to conduct themselves as a Minister or a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people and the children are looking up to us as elected Members. Honourable Prime Minister, I urge that you should change the Minister for Sugar, or he should hand in his resignation. Also, God knows when the promises of the local elections will come by under this Government.

I thank the Committee Members and the secretariat for their work. I thank the staff at the Fijian Elections Office and that is my contribution to the motion.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Consolidated Review Report on the 2020-2023 Electoral Commission Annual Reports.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, we can divide these three years into two categories. One is preparation year and, of course, the election year of 2022. Out of the three reports that was discussed by the Committee, the Committee raised six important recommendations.

During that period, you would agree with me that there were, indeed, many other issues that the Report ought to have picked up or could have picked up during the period because let us face it - it was, indeed, a period of great political control of the electoral system. It was a period where independence only existed by name and interference was indeed rife. Even a few months away from the 2022 Elections, the FijiFirst Government was still enacting amendment legislation that were more oppressive than the conduct of Elections in 2022.

Round about 2nd September, 2022, this is just a few months before the December elections, they passed the Electoral (Amendment) Act (Bill No. 49 of 2022), and made amendments to section 6 of the Electoral Act. Section 6 of the Principal Act speaks about the powers of the Supervisor of Elections, and that was amended and was it invested with more powers. SOE had powers then, through the amendment to demand for information, to even get documents from you. There are, or he or she as the Supervisor of Elections maybe relevant to any type of investigation that the person

may feel that he wants to investigate during that time.

Not just that, they have added on extra power in the provision, to say that the power of the Supervisor of Elections to demand information from you. Honourable Charan Jeeth Singh would exist even if there were any other laws that say it is protected by confidentiality, secrecy, or provisions of privilege. In other words, we signed the Secrecy Act, or we signed provisions under the Secrecy Act to maintain things that are secret to the order of our jobs. The power of the Supervisor of Elections will overcome that, even by just writing to you a letter saying that “I demand from you certain information or documents” that he believes that you have.

Then there are penal provisions, \$50,000 for individuals, or five years imprisonment, or if it is a corporation, \$500,000 and five years of imprisonment for the director or the CEO, in that case. The SOE has powers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just by a simple direction or by a letter - he has powers under the amendment provisions to get from you information that even the Commissioner of Police does not have powers under his Act.

The police have to come to your door and serve you with a subpoena, serve you with a search warrant, in order to get things from you lawfully. In this case, all that you get is a simple letter saying, “these are information that I believe you have, and you have a few days in which you are supposed to hand that over across to me.” He is not an investigative, does not have investigative capacity. He is not an investigative arm of any government, yet he was invested a few months just before the election with provisions that we say, are very oppressive.

We may think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, well, is this part of updating election laws that needed to be updated anyway. The subtle use of the law that time to threaten people from participating in something which must be free, and held in a free environment, free from executive overreach, and free from laws that suppress the rights to participate in election continued even to the election year.

By 2022, the FijiFirst Government had been in power for over 16 years. By this time, I am sure that they had forgotten that the notion of democracy means a system of government where power ultimately rests in the people. And an election, in 2022, the people turned up, they voted them out, and the FijiFirst Government is now officially wound up – thank you.

And who could have forgotten, Mr. Speaker, the law that required women to change the name on their birth certificates to reflect their married names? That was an absurd idea, was it not? Whoever came up with that idea should go into the Guinness World Records as the dumbest electoral law mind in the entire universe. Now, the honourable Rinesh Sharma was asking about the number of women who turned up, both registered and voted in the 2022 elections while they came to vote you out and voted out your party.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, the Coalition Government has decided, we are going to hold a review and we have held a review of the electoral laws, we have met citizens, we have met groups, we have received submissions, they heard their views and now people want the election to be conducted and it is a far cry, Mr Speaker, Sir, from the model that was exercised by the previous government. They legislated and they expect the people to comply. We have changed that, we have gone out to the public, we have heard their views, and we are going to bring back into this House a set of new electoral laws that are going to adopt the views of the people as well as the Constitution that the people wanted.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost let me just say, thank you to the Committee and the fellow Committee Members for this particular Report that is before the House.

But because the time is short, there are some very relevant issues that have come up in this particular Report that has been presented to Parliament. I just wanted to say a couple of things, with respect to matters that have been mentioned by the last couple of speakers.

Let me just remind everyone on that side of the House, the elections that brought them to that side of the House shows you how free and fair they were. They sit there in Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hogwash.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This is not hogwash, that is the truth. You sit there in Government because you went through the elections, whichever way you may like to term it, but you now sit in Government. How can you not be fair and free if you are sitting in Government? Let me just remind you of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it might have been the use of a better choice of words if we are going to talk about the actual electoral system. Just like anything, I think, every year we have had these elections right through and by the way, let me remind the other side of the House, FijiFirst was not in existence 16 years ago. FijiFirst came about in 2014, not 2013. FijiFirst was not in power for 16 years. So please, correct your maths.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Semantics.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is not semantics, it is about correcting yourself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some very pertinent issues that come up whenever we do this with respect to the Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office. Now, those issues are the issues that need to be addressed. A lot of these issues also come out of the Multinational Observer Group Report. That report is fairly comprehensive, and I think that report is fairly reflective of the situation in Fiji, whether it is bad or good or what needs changing, et cetera. Like anything in this world, you have an election, after a while you need to review a lot of things which is currently happening. You are in government; you are going to review it - so be it. Just make it fair.

Now, one of the things that I wanted to address, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we had a good look at as a committee, was how do you address this low voter turnout? We have had compulsory voting in the years, I think it was quite early, the honourable Prime Minister will remember this, compulsory voting was utilised in 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2006.

As you look at the figures that have come out, the voter turnout for those years stood at 84 percent in 1997, 89 percent in 1999, 80 percent in 2001 and 68 percent respectively in 2006. That was quite high voter turnout. But if you did a comparison, that was compulsory voting. But in the year 2014, we had 595,000 odd voters and the number of votes cast was 496. So, we had a 84 percent turnout then. But progressively, in 2018 and 2022, it is gotten lower. Now we are down to 68 percent. This is something that was spoken of, or we spoke to the Electoral Commission regarding this. The Chairman, Justice Ratuveli explained to us, and FEO had acknowledged the factors with respect to that particular low voter turnout, and it was particularly among youth and overseas voters.

The honourable Acting Attorney-General spoke about overseas voters, but I think he ought to, before he jumps the gun regarding making any review, et cetera, he needs to see the figures and actually look at it properly. From what I understand, and I may be corrected if I am wrong, from what I understand, about 12,000 odd voters somewhere around there were registered from overseas. However, the actual voting numbers numbered in the hundreds - 600 to be exact. So, I think that is

something that needs to be addressed clearly for any political party.

It was not because they had received the wrong sheet of paper or the timing. The low turnout is actually quite considerable. That is something that we had spoken about with respect to FEO and the Fiji Electoral Commission that needed to be addressed because to be honest, Sir, sometimes elections go, and it is a matter of a 1,000 people. What actually happens in Fiji, that could affect whether a particular political party is in Government or not. To lose out on roughly 10,000 odd people who have not voted, we need to find out what the reasons are. That is a considerable number of people.

I understand that when we have another set of elections, there will be more people that will have to be registered, more people that will be accountable at the end of the day, so the Fijian Elections Office will have to find out as to what is the actual reason why that occurred. I think in 2024, there was a voter perception survey that was done, and it highlighted a few things - lack of public trust in the FEO, accessibility of FEO services and materials used for awareness were not suitable for the actual targeted audience. There are a considerable number of things that the Electoral Commission will need to attend to. There was a number of invalid votes which we needed to be addressed.

The ineffective strategies, the voter perception survey was conducted in areas that recorded low voter turnout whilst the survey identified reasons of decline, it did not make a comparison of voter turnout between the different polling stations. So, there were methodologies that were used that may be a bit questionable with respect to how we actually find out why these people did vote or did not vote. With voter apathy was actually huge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my time has run out but in effect, I think that is one of the most important things that needs to be addressed by the FEO with respect to the next election. I hope and pray that the review that is being done will be looked at completely independently. Honourable Acting Attorney-General, I think, maybe, we ought to just wait and not jump the gun before we do anything with respect it because the MOG Report, there is also another combined report that is coming from the Committee before any decisions are made about what needs to be done.

HON. RATU. J. B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report on the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Electoral Commission Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that this august House endorse the recommendations in the Consolidated Review Report to ensure that the Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office are better supported in the legislative responsibilities. There are many learnings from the past three elections. We have to ensure that the Fijian voters' access voter services or cast their votes freely without fear or pressure from anyone.

The Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office are on the move this year to prepare for the upcoming general elections, which according to the Constitutional timelines can be anytime between 7th August, 2026 to 6th February, 2027.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted that while the Commission and the Fijian Elections Office have strengthened electoral systems, concern remains over declining voter turnout from 84 percent in 2014 to 68 percent in 2022 and the number of invalid votes cast.

The Committee highlighted issues such as logistical barriers for tertiary students, lack of ethnicity-based voter data and limited public trust in the electoral process. It was also noted the absence of audited financial statements in all three reports and the need to enhance collaboration between the Births, Deaths and Marriages Office and the Fijian Elections Office for accurate voter records.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were six recommendations that were discussed in the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. However, I am focusing my presentation this afternoon on incorporating ethnicity data to better understand voter demographics which I believe is the cause of the low voter turnout in the past three elections.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that during the FijiFirst Government, it has taken a stance against the collection and release of ethnically disintegrated data in Fiji. If you remember correctly, this controversy surrounding this issue was the cause of the sacking of Mr. Kemueli Naiqama, the current CEO of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

We cannot do consultation, Mr. Speaker, and the Fijian Elections Office cannot do trainings and all the resources allocated to train our voters when we cannot understand or even realize which particular ethnicity is left behind. That is why I am really glad that this Report has come up and I thank the honourable Acting Attorney-General and the Minister that this issue will be taken on board by the current Government, and I would like to congratulate the Committee for this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these recommendations aim to build greater transparency, inclusiveness and confidence in the Fiji Election System, ensuring that every eligible Fijian has equitable access to the right to vote. With those few words, Sir, I support the motion before the House.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also a Members of the Committee and I endorse the recommendations of the Report. Listening to some of the things that were said I was chuckling to myself. I think what we see in Fiji, despite what everyone says on that side, democracy is alive in this country. The proof is that you are sitting there, we are sitting here and some that were sitting with us have now decided to join you. Democracy lives in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was particularly glad to see when the Committee was meeting with Justice Usaia Ratuveli and the Chairman of the Electoral Commission about the things that they are working on to improve it. As has been said, our challenge, even though our voter turnout is 68 percent, they tell us that globally and, in the Pacific, this is a fairly good percentage at voter turnout. I think for all of us, we want to be able to move that up.

The challenge for us, I think is the 190,000 that did not vote. I think that is going to be the big challenge for us. I was glad to see that the Fijian Elections Office realized what the problem was, how they were trying to spread the awareness. They will talk about going to pre-poll, places where they were supposed to be pre-polling and people are out fishing.

Obviously, they did not know that pre-polling was supposed to take place at that particular point in time. So, it is the awareness mechanisms that they have and making sure that those mechanisms are fit for purpose. One great development that we were seeing now is that they are not just relying on the media presentations, they are going into social media but now they are trying to work together with the community. I think what the Fijian Elections Office is now proposing that by the fourth quarter of this year, they have identified 450 community educators, people that are already working in organisations, community organisations and they will use this to spread this message so people can understand the voting.

As honourable Koya said, we had about 9,000 or 12,000 of people who registered vote overseas, but a very small number voted. But that big concern for us is getting the 190,000 there. They did do a perception survey after 2018 and they used that as a basis to a plan for the 2022 General Elections, but the lower turnout probably shows that what came out of that voter participation survey and what they implemented was not good enough to raise the voter turnout. I am glad to see what they are doing now.

As I have said, they are working together with grassroots people, these 450 communicators and there are other programmes. I think there is a programme now that they are trying to bring programming to the schools. I think approval has to be given by the Ministry of Education for the SET Programme. They call it the SET programme to try to get children on board so that we can continue to improve the turnout that we have.

There were a number of things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted just to highlight. One is the national voter register is updated every six months. They take out the people who have passed away, put in the new ones, but there needs to be an external audit. This is something that has been agreed from 2018, but it has never been done. Why? Obviously, the Fijian Elections Office is trying its very best to get this, to get a third party to do the audit so at the end of the day, we know that our National Voter Register is complete. So, we hope that they will be able to complete that, so that we can have a lot of assurance about the National Voter Register.

One of the things that we talked about, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the current legislation, it talks about domestic observers of the election process. Currently, the legislation says that the Minister decides who should be those observers. I think one of the feelings in the Committee is, maybe, we should make the Electoral Commission the one that decides. We remove any possibility of people interpreting - bias politically about who becomes a domestic observer. That is something that we hope will be discussed.

One of the things that is discussed in this particular report is that things have overtaken us. As we are looking at this Annual Report, at the same time we have the Joint Report on the 2022 General Elections which the Committee will be presenting later this week, and we also have the Fiji Law Reform Commission that is looking at all of these. So, I think we are building up all of these and we are all expecting to see what comes out of that Fiji Law Reform Commission.

The recommendations that have been made here on the Joint Report that will probably be tabled later this week will culminate in that, and as Members of the Committee, we will be looking forward to looking at what the Fiji Law Reform Commission comes up with on suggestions that we can review as part of the learnings from this whole process.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the recommendations of the Report to Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a brief contribution with regard to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights Consolidated Review Report on the Electoral Commission's 2020, 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my contribution today in six minutes will be in two essential parts, one is just to reflect on where we have gotten to now, and then just make some specific comments in terms of the Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you reflect on what this side of the House has done, through the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister, it boils down to one simple sentence - we have brought back the real democracy to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sadly, and with utmost due respect to the other side of the House, over the last 16 years or 18 years or whatever number of years you want to talk about, sadly, democracy existed in name only. I will cite some specific examples.

Firstly, the media was muffled; there were restrictions on the media. The Media Industry Development Act 2010 was basically creating an atmosphere of fear in this country. People could not report properly. The favoured radio and newspapers were given latitude to openly criticise those in the Opposition. This was the type of democracy which they are talking about that existed in this country.

In our first formal sitting in Parliament after the maiden speeches, we removed the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA). We threw it into the dustbin of history where MIDA belongs, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

After that, we threw also into the dustbin of history the laws that honourable Vosarogo was talking about, that restricted women's votes. It was quite embarrassing, Mr. Speaker. Women were forced to go and change their birth certificates to choose between their maiden name and their married name. This was all brought in for obvious reasons, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we reflect on number one, it has brought back true democracy to Fiji. We now have a fairer treatment of the media. They are now reporting freely. We now have the ability to move forward and keep on building on what we believe is going to be the new Fiji, a freer and more genuinely democratic Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought I would touch on some of the specific recommendations in the Report, and one of the ones that caught my eye was the low voter turnout. I suppose in 2014, everyone was so excited. Everyone believed that there could be change in the country, so the turnout was very high. However, once reality sets in, the numbers started receding.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some ridiculous laws that they brought in - the blackout law, the rules that you cannot transport your own supporters to the voting booths. If you recall during our times in voting, it was a festive activity. Everyone did *lovo* and whatever and we sat around. That was at their cost, not at the Government cost. It created that enthusiasm to go and express your vote. If they are wondering why the voter turnout was low, it was their own doing, Sir, that brought about that.

Finally, on the overseas vote which had some discussion, it was so difficult to actually get the overseas votes done. Some people did not receive their ballots on time, so they could not vote. These are things that we, on this side of the House, will genuinely look at it, to ensure that every single person, whether they are in Fiji or outside Fiji, have the ability to vote and express their views on the day of the elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second point that I thought I would share with you is on the absence of financial statements. I know in the previous discussion; the suggestion was correctly made that it is really a reflection on what used to happen on the other side of the House - the lack of financial discipline and accountability on that side of the House.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. M.S.N.KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am proposing, going forward and, perhaps, something that the Business Committee could consider, when we bring these reports into the House, if they do not have audited financials, they are not worthy of consideration in this House. Sir, I am just suggesting it and, perhaps, it is something that the honourable Prime Minister can consider and the Business Committee, but we cannot be discussing things in the House without proper financial accountability.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to support the honourable Rinesh Sharma on the app. Be assured, honourable Sharma, that we did not want to remove the app, but that was a decision that was made from the Supervisor of Elections. Hopefully, the Acting Attorney- General can address that, because I quite agree that the app creates a lot of transparency in the voting, and it allows everyone in Fiji to monitor the vote very clearly. It is possibly one of the remotely positive things that the other side of the House contributed to the elections.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their Report and I support the motion.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members who have made contributions to the motion. I am particularly thankful to the honourable Acting Attorney- General who has made assurances in this august House that the recommendation that has been put forth by the Committee will be looked into.

I wish to also commend the leadership of the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, Justice Ratuveli, and also the Supervisor of Elections and her staff, and wish them well as they prepare the country forward for the next general election.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. A very lively evening, especially, I must say. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.39 p.m.

Reply to Written Question No. 95/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry (Ref. Page 2165)



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

Response to honourable V. Pillay's question is as follows:

Following the unfortunate fire incident at the Rarawai Mill this year, the Fiji Sugar Corporation Limited (FSC) has been implementing a comprehensive rehabilitation and maintenance programme to restore the Mill to full operational capacity. The repair works are progressing steadily and are being implemented in accordance with the approved schedule. The rehabilitation programme covers major mechanical, electrical, and instrumentation works, all of which are critical to the safe and efficient operation of the Mill. As of October 2025, progress achieved stands at:

- 50 percent for Mechanical and Civil Works,
- 36 percent for Electrical Works, and
- 33 percent for Instrumentation and Control Systems.

These works form part of the broader recovery effort to restore the Rarawai Mill following the fire incident. The recovery plan also includes the realignment and relocation of equipment and instruments to improve overall efficiency and effectiveness.

The Corporation anticipates completing the necessary rehabilitation works to enable factory operation trials by the last week of November 2025, with the commencement of crushing operations by the first week of December 2025. The balance of the work, mainly building and roofing rehabilitation, and the delivery and installation of standby diesel generators, is expected to be completed by May 2026. This extended timeline is primarily due to manufacturing and shipping lead times for imported components and equipment. However, these balance works will not impact on the Mill resumption slated for the first week of December.

Mr. Speaker, the total cost of the damage is not available for publication at this stage, as the assessment process is still ongoing. The fire report has not yet been finalised, and the insurer is continuing its evaluation. There are various levels of assessment involved, each of which takes time to complete, and there are also legal obligations that must be met before the final figures can be released.

The Corporation continues to work closely with its technical partners to ensure the project remains on track despite procurement and logistical challenges. All works are being carried out under strict safety and quality standards, with regular progress monitoring and reporting to ensure adherence to the rehabilitation plan. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FSC is confident that milling operations at the Rarawai Mill will resume safely and efficiently by the first week of December 2025, following successful commissioning and trial runs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Rarawai Mill rehabilitation represents a critical step in maintaining our national milling capacity and safeguarding the livelihoods of the many farmers who depend on it. The Government, through FSC, is closely monitoring progress and remains committed to ensuring the successful and timely restoration of the Mill.

Reply to Written Question No. 217/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management (Ref. Page 2165)



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

Response to honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua's question is as follows:

Background

1. The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management continues to drive its mandate of reducing rural isolation and improving connectivity through two major programmes - the Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footcrossings (CARFF) Programme and the Rural and Outer Island Development (ROI) Programme.

- (a) Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footcrossings (CARFF) Programme

The CARFF Programme strategically targets communities that remain physically and economically isolated due to inadequate access infrastructure. It focuses on constructing and upgrading community access roads, footpaths, and footcrossings, to provide safe and reliable connections between villages and rural settlements to critical public services such as schools, health facilities, and markets.

Importantly, CARFF is a community-driven initiative, anchored on the principles of self-help, ownership, and sustainability. Communities identify their priorities, contribute labour or local materials, and play an active role in maintaining completed projects. This participatory model ensures cost-effectiveness, enhances community responsibility, and promotes long-term infrastructure sustainability.

- (b) Rural and Outer Island Development (ROI) Programme

The ROI Programme provides a broader and a more integrated development framework, focusing on multi-sectoral infrastructure interventions that promote rural economic growth and improve service delivery in outer islands and remote communities. ROI supports the construction of rural roads, bridges, jetties, and other enabling infrastructure that facilitate mobility, market access, and inclusive participation, particularly in Fiji's economic systems. It also serves as the Ministry's flagship mechanism for inter-ministerial and donor coordination, aligning national priorities with sectoral strategies for agriculture, trade, fisheries, and forestry.

2. Strategic Impact and Alignment

Together, CARFF and ROI underpin the Ministry's strategic vision to foster inclusive and resilient rural communities. These programmes directly contribute to the implementation of the revised Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF), the National Development Plan (NDP), and Fiji's Vision 2050.

The outcomes achieved through these interventions are not only improving physical accessibility but are also catalysing economic activities, strengthening social cohesion, and reinforcing disaster resilience at the community level.

In essence, these programmes remain key instruments for transforming rural livelihoods, bridging development gaps between urban and rural Fiji, and advancing the Government's broader agenda of leaving no one behind.

The information provided here are only relating to CARFF, as the details for ROI will be in the response to the Written Question 241/2025.

(a) Number of rural road crossings constructed for the period January 2023 to June 2025:

Division	January 2023-July 2023			August 2023-July 2024			August 2024-July 2025			Total
	Roads	Footpaths	Footbridges	Roads	Footpaths	Footbridges	Roads	Footpaths	Footbridges	
Central	3	2	1	5	2	6	11	2	1	33
Eastern	1	0	2	2	2	4	4	7	1	23
Northern	3	0	1	9	0	1	9	1	1	25
Western	7	0	1	14	1	2	12	0	1	38
Total	14	2	5	30	5	13	36	10	4	119

(b) Number of rural road crossings under construction to-date:

Division	August 2025-July 2026			Total
	Roads	Footpaths	Footbridges	
Central	8	4	1	13
Eastern	3	1	6	10
Northern	9	0	2	11
Western	9	1	2	13
Total	29	6	11	47

(c) Number of rural road crossings maintained for the period January 2023 to June 2025.

The Ministry does not have a specific budgetary allocation dedicated solely to the maintenance of rural roads. However, the upgrading and improvement of existing access roads are often undertaken as part of the broader rural infrastructure projects implemented under the Ministry's programmes. These upgrading works are, therefore, captured within the data provided under questions (a) and (b), which include both new constructions and improvements to existing community access roads.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 218/2025 tabled by the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises, Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Ref. Page 2165-2166)



**PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, CIVIL SERVICE
AND PUBLIC ENTERPRISES, TRADE, COOPERATIVES, MICRO, SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES
(Hon. S.L. Rabuka)**

Response to honourable P.D. Kumar's question is as follows:

The expenditure incurred by Government in respect to the participation of the Prime Minister, five Ministers and one Assistant Minister during Independence Day Celebrations abroad in 2025, is as follows:

	MINISTER	PORTFOLIO	COST (FJ\$) [Provided by respective Ministries]
1.	Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka	Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises	\$8,899.95
2.	Hon. Siromi Turaga	Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General	\$11,783.84
3.	Hon. Agni Singh	Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations	\$7,165.72
4.	Hon. Jese Saukuru	Minister for Youth and Sports	\$8,585.93
5.	Hon. Sashi Kiran	Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection	\$6,328
6.	Hon. Lynda Tabuya	Minister for Information	\$11,551.68
7.	Hon. Penioni Ravunawa	Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services	\$10,500.55
	TOTAL		\$64,815.67

**Reply to Written Question No. 219/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education
(Ref. Page 2166)**



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

Response to honourable H. Chand's question is as follows:

The Ministry of Education, since October 2025, released Term 1 and Term 2 grants to majority of schools across the country, except for those institutions who have yet to comply with the Ministry's Financial Compliance and Administrative Standards issues.

Furthermore, note that the following Education Centres which are yet to receive their grants are as follows:

ECE Centres

85 ECE Centres have yet to receive their grants with the delays mainly due to the late submission of Annual Financial Reports and outstanding registration or bank account details, which prevent the Ministry from creating vendor details in the new FMIS system.

Primary Schools

22 primary schools that have yet to receive their grant are due to compliance issues which includes incomplete Class Audit Updates and the non-submission or late submission of Annual General Meeting (AGM) Minutes and Annual Financial Reports (AFR).

Secondary Schools

Two secondary schools have yet to receive their grants, and the main reasons include the late submission of AGM and AFR reports, as well as the compulsory requirement to submit bank reconciliation statements to ensure proper accountability before funds are released.

In the interim, the Ministry continues to work closely with respective School Heads and Management to resolve these compliance matters and facilitate the timely release of all remaining grants.