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PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.34 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 4th November, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome those who are watching the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for staying connected and also being engaged in our parliamentary platforms as we attempt to progress Fiji forward together.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Report - Consumer Council of Fiji 2019-2023 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's Consolidated Review Reports on the 2019-2020, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 Consumer Council of Fiji Annual Reports.

As mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee considers issues related to health, education, social service, labour, aviation, culture and media. The vision of the Consumer Council of Fiji is achieved through its four strategic goals:

- (1) Improving consumer ability to make informed decisions
- (2) Driving change to benefit consumers
- (3) Solving consumer complaints through mediation
- (4) Fostering high-performance organisation

The Committee in its deliberations has made eight recommendations in this Report to strengthen the Council with its consumer awareness campaign, staff development programme and its collaboration with other stakeholders in bringing timely consumer assistance. Furthermore, the Committee recommends the proposed establishment of a Consumer Fusion Centre that will bring various consumer agencies together under one roof to provide efficient services to consumers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I sincerely thank the Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Seema Sandil, and the officials for their invaluable contributions during this review process. I am thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia, and honourable Parveen Bala for their invaluable contributions and support. I extend my sincere appreciation to honourable Jone Usamate and honourable Alvick Maharaj for their contributions and support as Alternate Members.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

Consolidated Review Report – Fiji National Provident Fund 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji National Provident Fund 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports. The FNPf continues to play a pivotal role in safeguarding the retirement and savings of all Fijians, with total assets reaching \$10.6 billion as of June 2024. Of this, \$8.1 billion belongs directly to the members. The Fund now serves over 423,000 members, with 264,000 active contributors, 14,138 voluntary active contributors, and maintains relationships with 8,488 active employers.

Despite the challenges posed by global economic conditions, particularly the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fund has maintained a strong investment portfolio. However, the Committee noted that interest earned from Government bonds has remained stagnant since 2020 due to high liquidity in the market. To address this, the Committee recommends that the Government and the Reserve Bank of Fiji facilitate easier approval processes to offshore investments, enabling greater diversification and improved returns.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee also acknowledges the ongoing review of the FNPf Act, aimed at aligning the Fund's operations with modern business practices and evolving investment strategy. We recommend that this review continue with robust public consultations and stakeholder engagement to ensure the legislation reflects the need of today's workforce.

As part of its legislative reform, the Committee commends FNPF's effort to explore mechanism that would allow seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand to contribute to the Fund. This initiative is vital for enhancing financial inclusion and the long-term saving for Fijians employed abroad. We recommend that the FNPF expedite legislative amendments and strengthen stakeholder co-ordination to support this initiative.

Transparency remains a cornerstone of public trust. The Committee noted with concern that major investment decisions are not being adequately communicated to the public. We recommend that FNPF strengthens its communication mechanisms, ensuring members are informed of significant investment decisions, including associated risks and benefits.

Madam Deputy Speaker, operationally, while the Fund has expanded its service, the Committee observed a need to strengthen cost control measures, particularly around consultancy fees and operational expenses. We recommend that FNPF enhance its financial efficiency while maintaining service quality.

The Committee also noted an increase in suspended accounts, often due to incomplete employee submissions. We recommend continued employer education and improved submission processes to ensure accurate member contributions.

I thank the Chief Executive Officer of the Fiji National Provident Fund and the officials for their service and contribution to this review process, and I commend the implementation of our recommendation.

I am thankful to the honourable Members - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Aliko Bia and honourable Parveen Bala for their invaluable contribution and support. I extend my appreciation to the honourable Jone Usamate for his contribution and support as an Alternate Member.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Fiji Airways 2023 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the 2023 Fiji Airways Annual Report.

As mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee looks into issues related to

health, education, social service, labour, aviation, culture and media.

Fiji Airways connects Fiji to over 27 international destinations including Australia, New Zealand, United States and the Pacific Islands. Fiji Airways is a member of the Oneworld Alliance and continues to play a pivotal role in the tourism industry, contributing significantly to Fiji's economic growth. Fiji Airways has a rich history marked by significant milestones, partnerships and a commitment to connecting Fiji to the world while celebrating its unique cultural heritage.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Fiji Airways notable achievements during the year 2023 were as follows:

- (1) Fiji Awards reduced its debt level by \$100 million;
- (2) Carried 2.2 million passengers, an increase from 1.4 million in 2022 and 1.7 million in 2019;
- (3) Grew its seat capacity by 47 percent;
- (4) Operated 26,586 international, regional and domestic flights in 2023, representing a 40 percent growth from 2022;
- (5) Added two additional state-of-the-art Airbus A3500-900 to its fleet;
- (6) In 2023 Fiji Airways added Canberra and Noumea to its airline network;
- (7) Fiji Airways commenced Phase 2 construction of Fiji Airways Aviation Academy, costing \$130 million, with \$49 million spent in 2023; and
- (8) Fiji Airways was awarded with the SKYTRAX 2023 World Airline Awards for Best Airline, Best Airline Staff and Best Airline Services in Australia and the Pacific.

I would like to sincerely thank the Board Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer of Fiji Airways and the officials for their valuable contributions to this review process.

I am thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs – honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Parveen Bala and honourable Alikhi Bia for their valuable input and support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report - Water Authority of Fiji 2019-2022 Annual Reports

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I am pleased to present the Committees' Consolidated Review Report on the

2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Water Authority of Fiji Annual Reports. This Report underscores the Committee's dedication to promoting transparency, accountability and good governance within Fiji's vital water sector.

Throughout the review period, the Water Authority of Fiji has endeavoured to enhance its operational effectiveness, address infrastructural challenges and improve service delivery to the Fijian public. The Committee has meticulously examined the Authority's performance, financial management and strategic initiatives as outlined in the annual reports.

A significant component of this review involved the Committee's site visit conducted from 15th to 19th September, 2025. This visit provided an essential opportunity for the Members to engage directly with the Water Authority personnel, observe operational practices firsthand, and assess the impact of ongoing projects within various communities. The insights gained during this visit have been instrumental in forming the Committee's findings and recommendations.

The Committee commends the Water Authority for its continued efforts and remains committed to supporting initiatives that promote sustainable water management and equitable access for all Fijians. It is our hope that the recommendations contained herein will contribute to strengthening the Authority's capacity and advancing Fiji's water sector in alignment with national development priorities.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Committee Members for their diligence and to the Water Authority of Fiji for their co-operation throughout this process.

On behalf of the Standing Committee, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order!

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- There is Point of Order - Standing Order 125(3), which reads:

“Determination of the Business Committee takes effect when it is notified in writing to all Members of Parliament. A determination must be published and circulated on the Order Paper before any sitting of Parliament at which it is to apply.”

The meaning of this Standing Order, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that once the Business Committee has agreed to what is to be discussed in Parliament, motions cannot be withdrawn willy-

nilly.

And on that line, I am raising this Standing Order in terms of the third motion on day one, which was the Report on the Higher Education Commission that was withdrawn. My understanding of this, that it is not possible for anyone, once it has been tabled in Parliament and passed by the Business Committee, that you cannot withdraw a motion. That particular motion called for a commission of inquiry into something that happened in the way grants were awarded by Higher Education Commission.

On that ground, Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that you cannot remove that from the Order Paper because it has been approved already by the Business Committee according to the Standing Order. And on that notion, that debate on that motion needs to be put back into the House, and I suggest that it be done today or tomorrow.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Usamate. I take that under advisement, and I will defer to the honourable Speaker and he will make his ruling today.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Minister for Agriculture;
- (2) Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General – two Statements;
- (3) Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development – two Statements;
- (4) Minister for Youth and Sports;
- (5) Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection; and
- (6) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry.

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.

Agribusiness Incubation Centre

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honorable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honorable Members of Parliament and ladies and gentlemen. Before I deliver my Ministerial Statement, on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, I want to extend our deepest condolences to the family of the late Suliasi Taukele Tupou, who faithfully served the Livestock Dairy Section in Koronivia Research Station. Mr. Tupou's dedication and commitment to his duties over the years have left a lasting impression on those who work alongside him. We honour his life and service, and we pray that his family finds comfort during this time of sorrow. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Madam Deputy Speaker, firstly, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to honourable Manoa Kamikamica, former Minister for Trade, Co-operative, MSMEs and Communications for his visionary leadership, commitment and contribution to the development of Fiji's agriculture sector.

The establishment of the Agribusiness Incubation Centre stands as a testament of his dedication to empowering our farmers, fostering innovations and strengthening the agribusiness ecosystem across the nation. This initiative not only provides vital support and resources for our farming communities, but also paves the way for sustainable growth, entrepreneurship and food

security in Fiji.

In September 2025, Fiji marked a milestone in its agricultural history with the official launch of the country's first Agribusiness Incubation Centre. The Centre is not simply a new building or a line item in our planning document; it is a bold statement of intent. It demonstrates that we, as a Government, are determined to revitalise our agricultural sector by empowering the proper drivers of our economy - our youth, our women, and our micro, small and medium enterprises.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is clear that our farmers are the backbone of Fiji. Yet for too long, they have faced hurdles, aging demographics, limited access to innovation, and barriers to market access. Our women, who play an integral role in farm households and community food security have often been overlooked in training, finance and decision making.

Our young people, eager to build a viable futures in agribusiness, have lacked clear pathways from ideas to market. This situation is unacceptable. It is precisely to confront and overcome these challenges that the Agribusiness Incubation Centre - funded by the European Union's Sustainable Transformation of Domestic Agrifood Systems (STODAS) project and implemented through the Food and Agriculture Organisation has been established.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Centre's mission has been aligned with the strategic objective set out in Fiji's Non-sugar Agriculture Sector Policy 2025 to 2035. This policy envisions a dynamic, diversified, climate- smart agriculture sector, propelled by innovation and collective action. The Agribusiness Incubation Centre embodies these principles. It will serve as a dedicated hub where aspiring Fijian agripreneurs can access the tools, mentorship and resources they need to flourish - where new business models are tested, where traditional knowledge merges with cutting-edge technology, and where the barriers between concept and commercialisation are removed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to highlight concrete ways in which the Centre will make a difference. Firstly, it is a one-stop shop" for the entire agriculture business and guidance. The Agribusiness Incubation (ABI) Centre is designed as a dynamic hub that consolidates a wide range of essential services and support systems in one place to nurture innovative early-stage enterprises and help Fijian farmers or SMEs grow into competitive and sustainable businesses.

Secondly, it will provide tailored training and mentorship in agribusiness management, value-chain development and post-harvest handling.

Thirdly, the Centre will facilitate market access through linkages with exporters, processors and retailers.

Fourthly, it will establish incubation cohorts - promising agripreneurs - who will receive intensive coaching and shared workspace. By working collaboratively, participants will learn from each other's success and challenges, accelerating innovations across the board.

Finally, the Centre will champion climate-smart agriculture.

This is not theory, it is action. In close co-operation with the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications and the Fiji Crop & Livestock Council, the discussions are already underway to repurpose the existing agricultural institute into the National Agribusiness Incubation Centre. This facility will be upgraded with modern laboratories, demonstration plots, a business resource library and conferencing spaces - delivering a fully integrated platform for learning, experimentation and networking.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to place on record our appreciation to the European Union (EU) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. Their unwavering support, financial, technical and advisory has been instrumental in turning this vision into reality. Let me also be clear, external partners can provide resources and expertise, but the proper drivers of success will be our own farmers, our innovators and us as leaders of this nation. It is our collective responsibility to sustain this initiative through robust policies, timely funding and an enabling environment that rewards entrepreneurship.

Madam Deputy Speaker, global markets are evolving rapidly. Consumers demand greater transparency, quality assurance and sustainable production methods. Climate change poses existential threats to low-lying islands like ours. If we fail to equip our agricultural sector with the tools of innovation and resilience, we risk stagnation, food insecurity and economic vulnerability.

In contrast, if we seize this moment, if we back our youth, if we invest in our women, and if we support our MSMEs, we will:

- witness a transformation;
- watch smallholder farms grow into established agribusinesses;
- see employment opportunities multiply in rural communities, stemming the tide of urban migration; and
- establish Fiji as a regional leader in specialty agriculture, attracting investors, strengthening food sovereignty, and generating new export revenue streams.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I invite us to imagine a Fiji in 2030 - a thriving agriculture sector where young men and women see farming as a modern, respected career; where young men and women agripreneurs lead co-operatives and export their own branded products; where rural communities enjoy sustainable prosperity and climate-smart practices are the norm. This is not a distant dream - it is within our grasp. The Agribusiness Incubator Centre is our lever for change. Let us apply our collective strength, our political will and our national pride to make sure it delivers on its promise.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate for his reply.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement this morning. It is indeed agreed that agriculture is the backbone of Fiji. Farmers are the true heroes of this nation. Agriculture is Fiji's only way out of decades of challenge we face as a nation.

I thank the honourable Minister for the establishment and empowerment of an Agribusiness Incubation Centre. I would also like to thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition, when he was the Minister for Agriculture for the reforms and creative ideas he brought to this Ministry. This Centre will not merely be a building but a national instrument to empower farmers, accelerate innovation, and build resilience in our agriculture sector.

As policy makers, we need to create a bridge between innovation and practice, transform research and ideas from universities and private laboratories into farms and scalable solutions. We need to support smallholder farmers and start-ups, provide mentorship, access to finance, market linkages, and risk management tools, and generate resilience through diversification by promoting climate smart practices, value addition, diversified income that creates jobs and rural development, which has a ripple effect to stimulate local economies and reduce rural urban migration.

However, when we talk about agriculture, Madam Deputy Speaker, the first issue that arises is land - land accessibility and utilisation, which is very imperative for agriculture. So, whether it is iTLTB or Crown C, we need to ensure that a certain percentage of land in Fiji is forever agricultural land. We cannot be converting this agricultural lands into residential, tourism and industrial. Where will our people farm? We cannot be farming up in the mountains, where after digging one metre or half metre, you find soapstones. How would you get your staff to these sites and also logistics is expensive.

The sugar industry faces the same issue, Madam Deputy Speaker, the lack of farmers and access to land. Our agricultural land, I reiterate, located in remote areas where logistics costs become too high or a challenge. We have Fijians going to New Zealand and Australia to work on farms for decades while there is an abundance of land in Fiji - something is definitely wrong and we as policy makers need to fix this.

Sir, COVID-19 has taught us that we Fijians cannot consume, eat, buildings, trees, roads, bridges and footpaths. We talk about a failing infrastructure with our health care, but have we taken a look at our individual lifestyles? If I talk on consumption, how much of fresh and organic, and local based foods do we consume as Fijians is the question I ask? The key to improved health of Fijians and Fiji is in agriculture. It is in local production and government needs to relook at reducing the duty and taxes placed on the importations on some of the agricultural products.

We need streamlined approval processes, including customs, agriculture and the Ministry of Health for some of the imported items. I urge the Government to conduct the Agri Youth Innovation Summit, bring in the stakeholders in the supply chain, the development partners, the financial institutions and empower the creative bright minds of Fiji. This is one of the ways to reduce brain drain as we are facing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another suggestion is that through agriculture, AMA, iTLTB and the Ministry of Education, where hectares of land can be acquired, implement a one child, one tree policy where every child upon graduation plants a tree. This will create environmental awareness among our youth for greener businesses, boost production, export and generate income for our economy. If we look at the number of students graduating per year, it is close to 20,000 or probably 40,000.

On that note, I salute the farmers of Fiji for their relentless hard work. I wish the honourable Minister the very best in his efforts to uplift Fiji's agriculture sector.

Law and Justice Sector Reform 2025-2029

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow honourable Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, *ni sa bula vinaka* and very good morning to you all.

I rise to inform this august House on the historical milestone for our nation – the final report on the Functional Status of Fiji's Law and Justice Sector and the Law and Justice Sector Roadmap for Reform 2025 to 2029, both officially launched at Fiji's first-ever Justice Summit, held last Wednesday at the Crowne Plaza in Nadi.

The inaugural Justice Summit, hosted by the Ministry of Justice with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade brought together a diverse range of voices from across the sector including members of the Judiciary, the Office of the Attorney-General, Fiji Law Society, Fiji Corrections Service, law enforcement agencies, civil societies, *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*

and development partners such as UNDP, UNICEF, SPC and the European Union. I also acknowledge the presence of the honourable Minister for Immigration and the honourable Minister for Information. It was, without question, a landmark occasion, one that reimagined Fiji's legal landscape under the theme "*From Structure to Service - Justice for Every Fijian*".

Madam Deputy Speaker, this was the first time ever in over two decades that such a comprehensive review of the law and justice system was undertaken. The Summit marked not only the launch of not only two major national documents - the Final Report and the Roadmap - but also a renewed commitment to rebuild public trust and strengthen collaboration across all arms of justice.

The Final Report on the Functional Stages of the Fiji Law and Justice Sector is both sobering and hopeful. It lays bare the systemic challenges that have long hindered the efficiency and accessibility of justice in Fiji. These include:

- (1) Structural fragmentation and unclear mandates;
- (2) Judicial inefficiencies and precision case backlogs;
- (3) Digital and infrastructure deficiencies;
- (4) Human resource constraints;
- (5) Limited community engagement; and
- (6) Legal awareness.

The Report revealed that 87 percent of Fijians are unable to access formal legal redress due to cost and complexity. It also noted outdated laws, with some dating back to 1879 and institutions operating in silos without adequate coordination. This is something that the honourable Prime Minister emphasized yesterday - the silos syndrome that had persisted before we came in. Yet, it is also a story of resilience. Despite the challenges, our justice sector has continued to function through dedication, integrity and sheer commitment of our people. The Report now provides us with a roadmap to transform this resilience into reform and to move from coping to thriving.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Law and Justice Sector Reform Roadmap 2025 to 2029, endorsed by Cabinet, turns the findings of the Report into clear actionable priorities. It is structured around seven reform pillars that collectively envision a modern, efficient and people-centred justice system:

- (1) Justice system efficiency and backlog reduction;
- (2) Anti-corruption and oversight;
- (3) Registry and Legal Identity modernisation;
- (4) Access to Justice and Legal Inclusion;
- (5) Law Enforcement and Rehabilitation Reforms;
- (6) Legislative Reform and Interagency Coordination; and
- (7) Community engagement and Legal Awareness.

Each of these pillars represents not only a reform objective but a promise. A promise that justice in Fiji will be fair, transparent, and accessible to all.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Summit was marked by strong expressions of unity and collaboration. The Chief Justice, His Lordship Salesi Temo, in his remarks during the launch acknowledged the historical significance of the roadmap and announced several judiciary-led initiatives including e-filing pilots, AI transcriptions in high court, criminal divisions, virtual hearings for maritime regions and a 90-day disposal benchmarks for small claims and traffic cases. He reaffirmed that justice must be timely, accessible and sensitive ensuring no Fijian, whether in urban centres or remote islands is left behind.

Similarly, his closing address, Assistant Minister for Justice, honourable Ratu Josaia Niudamu reminded us that the reform is not optional, it is necessary. He urge all partners to uphold the spirit of *solesolevaki* - shared effort and shared purpose - as we move forward together. The Justice Summit and the Roadmap mark the beginning of a new chapter of Fiji's legal system, one that shifts our focus from structure to service, from institutions to people. The roadmap is not just a policy document, it is a living commitment to make justice human again, and to ensure that when a Fijian walks into a courtroom, registry, or police station, they feel respected, protected and heard.

Every Fijian, wherever they will be able to access services. In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, the past Monday, the Judiciary of the Fiji Court of Appeal announced and sat for the first time in Ba, the hearing of cases will continue till the 14th of this month. The President of the Court of Appeal says as court facilities outside Suva developed, the senior courts of Fiji will play its role in taking courts closer to the people. They say this is an effort to increase access to justice and send the message that the courts of Fiji is for all the people, not just those living in Suva. Chief Justice Salesi Temo welcomed the move and says that taking the Court of Appeal to Ba is a progressive step in making judiciary more accessible and inclusive.

As we move forward, the Ministry of Justice will:

- (1) Establish a Law and Justice Advisory Council to co-ordinate sector-wide implementation;
- (2) Develop a Digital Performance Dashboard to track progress and ensure accountability;
- (3) Partner with communities, civil society and traditional leaders to promote legal awareness and outreach.
- (4) Strengthen collaboration with development partners, ensuring that Fiji's reform journey remains inclusive and sustainable.

True reform takes time, perseverance and partnership. It demands courage to acknowledge what has not worked and wisdom to chart a better path. But above all, it requires faith - faith in our institutions, in each other, and in the Fijian spirit of resilience and unity. Madam Deputy Speaker, as we look ahead, let us remember that justice is not only a matter of law, but also a matter of trust and how fairly and compassionately we serve our people.

The success of the Justice Summit 2025 and the launch of the Law and Justice Sector Roadmap are a testament to what can be achieved when we work together across government, civil society and development partners in a true *solesolevaki* spirit. The collaboration and commitment to signing a non-legally binding *Justice Summit Wailoaloa Commitment* by both government and non-government actors across the Law and Justice Sector will be the document that continues to remind us that we are committed to working independently towards the common goal of transforming our justice system for all Fijians. Recognising that our strength is in our independence, fairness, collaboration, and commitment within our agencies and across agencies.

With hope and humility, we now embark on this journey of reform and renewal to build a justice system that truly delivers Justice for every Fijian. Madam Deputy Speaker, as I take my seat, I take this opportunity to thank my team at the Ministry of Justice, led by Permanent Secretary Ms. Selina Kuruleca, and the reports and Roadmap compiled by DFAT consultant former Ambassador, Mr. Luke Daunivalu.

I invite all Members of this august House to view this video with us - the Roadmap for our Justice Summit, the tangible outcomes, specific measurables and the commitment to ensuring the rule of law and the Separation of Powers of Government and access to Justice for every Fijian. The video can be found in our Ministry of Justice website, our *Facebook* page, and also by searching the Ministry of Justice on your *YouTube*. Copies of the Functional Review Status of the Law and Justice

Report and the Roadmap for the Reform of Law and Justice Sector is available outside of this Chamber for each member and their Ministry.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and fellow Parliamentarians. I want to thank the honourable Acting Attorney-General for his very colourful statement this morning.

I just want to remind him of a few things, that at the very core of what he has actually put before us today in terms of the final report and the functional status of Fiji's Law and Justice Sector and the Law and Justice Sector Roadmap, and at every junction, and at every word when this is looked at - one word that should and must always spring up, and that is independence. Whether it is the Judiciary or the institutions that are part and parcel of this particular justice sector roadmap. I want to remind the honourable Minister, I have a bone to pick with you, Sir, and I am sure you will accept this.

In your seven pillars for reform, you spoke about Cabinet endorsing seven things: efficiency, anti-corruption, registry modernisation, access to justice, law enforcement reform and legislative coordination. Let me remind you, honourable Minister, when you speak of legislative coordination, you must remember that Parliament forms one of the most basic parts of any justice sector roadmap. This is where the laws are made. This is where the laws are looked at. One of the most important parts of the machinery in all of this is the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. But let me just tell you, honourable Minister, you did not even invite the Committee. Very sad. On a daily basis, honourable Minister, we deal with this.

I am sure you know this, Sir - there are three lawyers there, but we were not invited to contribute. We are part of the heavy-duty machinery that does what you ask us to do. It is one of the most bipartisan Committees that exists in Parliament, honourable Minister. It is a very sad day when you have a list of so many luminaries who came to that particular conference that you had, but you did not invite us. It is sad, Sir, because you could have had some wonderful contribution from all of us because we deal with this on a daily basis, because we got to the public in terms of consultation with every single Bill that you put on our desk. But you forgot us, and that is very sad, Sir.

My advice to you, honourable Acting Attorney- General - and I hope you will take this from where it is coming from - it is coming from a passionate perspective because I am a lawyer. It is coming from a passionate perspective because I stand here on behalf of many people in this country. It is coming from a passionate perspective because it is Parliament. This is what we deal with.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- An invitation would have been nice.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- The reform journey - and you have spoken very eloquently about what needs to be done - it is accepted, honourable Acting Attorney- General. A lot of things need to be done, a lot of laws need to be changed. Three words that you have used, honourable Acting Attorney-General - people, trust and fairness. Independence also should be at the forefront of anyone's mind when we are actually looking at this.

Obviously, you will coordinate this through a Law and Justice Advisory Council, it is not too late to seek an audience and come down and sit with the actual Committee and say, "Look, what else can we do? Or how can you assist in actually doing this because you are the ones that are going to deal with this." I am not saying anything bad. I am just saying that you missed an opportunity, honourable Acting Attorney- General.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that this is a good thing. It is never a bad thing in terms of reform. It just has to be looked at in the perspective that you are speaking of, with respect to efficiency and anti-corruption. As we can see, the platform that we sit on currently is an absolute mess. It really is. It has created so many problems. The public perception is really bad. These things need to be spoken about. It cannot be hidden under the table. It needs to be spoken about without fear of persecution or prosecution. At the end of the day, people need to be able to make sure that they contribute properly to this so that we can have a good justice sector in terms of the law and the justice sector, and the roadmap will be a good one for us to follow to ensure that we have that particular kind of justice sector that we want - that should be the envy of the rest of the world.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it is 10.25 a.m., I think it is a good time now to adjourn for morning tea. We will come back in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.26 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

150th Anniversary of the Fiji Corrections Service

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of Opposition, fellow Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I warmly greet you again after our brief morning tea.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to inform this august House of a significant milestone in Fiji's history, the 150th Anniversary of the Fiji Corrections Service, which was commemorated last week. This historic celebration marks not only a century and a half of institutional endurance but a transformation from a colonial era prison system focused on punishment to a modern correction service that now champions rehabilitation, restoration and reintegration. The university provided a moment of reflection, gratitude and renewed purpose. It was an opportunity to honour those who have served with courage and conviction, and to recognise the continuing evolution of service as a cornerstone of Fiji's justice system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Fiji Corrections Service traces its roots to the year 1875, when the early prison system was formally separated from the police under the 1884 Ordinance. Back then, the first prison was established beside the police station in the area known as Nasese, a name derived from the *iTaukei* word *sese*, meaning lost. The symbolism is profound. The Fiji Corrections Service has, from the very beginning, stood at the crossroad between loss and restoration, guiding those who have lost their way back towards the path of redemption. In later years, the prison relocated to Korovou, near St. Giles Psychiatric hospital and cemetery, areas once referred to in colonial times as places for mad, bad and dead, but even there the seeds of transformation were sown.

The introduction of the Prisons Ordinance (Cap 86) on 10th July, 1970, marked a pivotal shift towards modern correctional standards and humane treatment of inmates. Over the past 150 years, the Fiji Corrections Service has weathered many challenges and defining moments. We recall the riots of 1968, the burning of the Suva Prison in 1979, and the uprising at Natabua later the same year. We also remember the May 2000 crisis, when prisoners overpowered officers in Naboro and hostages were taken in Suva. These events, while painful, became a catalyst for reform, innovation and strength. They shape the modern correction service we know today, an institution built on resilience, courage and lessons learned through adversity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we pay tribute to the men and women who served during these difficult times. Notably, Mr. Sairusi Gauna, who was only 19 years of age, bravely stood his ground during the 1979 Suva Prison riot, exemplifying courage and loyalty to duty. Likewise, Mr. Leone Vueti has experienced same incident that inspired the creation of the Emergency Control Unit or what is now commonly called ECU, a critical component of the Fiji Corrections Service that ensures safety and stability of our correctional institutions today. I also pay tribute to the former Commissioners, honourable Naivalurua and honourable Vasu who were part of this transformation and are now seated in this august House.

During the week-long celebration, the Fiji Corrections Service also honoured ex-servicemen who bravery and leadership during the 2000 Naboro incident remain etched in our national memory. Their stories behind us remind us that the foundation of today's Fiji's Corrections Service was built on sacrifice, commitment and faith in the principle of justice. The world today presents new challenges, Madam Deputy Speaker. Offenders are younger. The influence of drugs and mental health issues is greater. The rehabilitation needs of inmates are far more complex.

Fiji Corrections Service has recognised that the purpose of correction is not only to secure but to heal. The institution is shifting its focus from reincarnation to rehabilitation and regeneration. Rehabilitation is about equipping inmates with education, vocational training, psychological and spiritual support so that they can lead productive lives upon release. The integration, however, is the greatest test. It calls for partnership across government especially for NGOs, churches, private sector and communities to help ex-offenders reintegrate into society with dignity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I take a moment to cite one good example, Mr. Vaione Tegu was pardoned by the Mercy Commission in 2022. He was convicted soon after he turned 18, so he became an adult. Almost 22 years he was in prison. He was a budding rugby player. Through the rehabilitation he kept to his dream, upon his release this year created a marked history for the Kadavu Provincial Council and for Kadavu Island being captain of the Kadavu team and winning the competition.

I also call on civil societies, Mr. Amenoni Nasilasila, a subject of discussion last year of our acceptance, let us remind what our honourable Prime Minister doctored, let love shine.

Matthew 18:21 and 22 states and I quote:

“Then Peter came up and said, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times but 77 times.’”

Matthew 6:14 and 15 states and I quote:

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Our Coalition Government is also drafting a new legislation following Cabinet endorsement in June 2025. The new proposed draft of the Criminal Records Bill will provide opportunities to facilitate reform and reintegration of ex-inmates who fulfilled the criteria agreed upon during consultation. The Bill will be an opportunity to make good on forgiveness for former inmates once they have served more than 10 years, some 20 to 30 years, they cannot go overseas. We cannot look at the indiscretion when they were 18, 19 and 20 years. The doctrine of love is paramount in this case.

Additionally, the ongoing rehabilitation services provided through Yellow Ribbon Project, a national movement that encourages all Fijians to give ex-offenders a second chance. Choose inclusion over exclusion and compassion over condemnation. This was a project that was introduced by honourable Naivaluarua, who is the Minister for Policing.

The 150th anniversary is not only a time to look back but also to look forward with hope. It reminds us that justice is not solely about punishment, but it is also about restoration, redemption and renewal. The theme of the week called upon every officer and every Fijian to remember the humanity that binds us all.

Hebrews 13:3 states and I quote:

“Remember those who are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.”

These words kept to the heart of what Fiji Corrections Service stands for, compassion, empathy and the shared duty to restore dignity where it was lost. Madam Deputy Speaker, as the line Minister, I take this time to thank the Fiji Correctional Service staff for their unwavering commitment to service, professionalism, and humanity in carrying out their duties. Every day, they deal with some of the society's most difficult realities, yet they do so with compassion, courage, and a sense of moral duty.

For 150 years, the Fiji Corrections Service, endured trials, celebrated triumphs and welcomed transformation. As we look ahead to the next 150 years, may this institution continue to embody compassion, professionalism and unity in its mission to build a safer, stronger, and more just communities for all Fijians.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker I also thank the honourable Minister for taking us through history, this is part of the history, not the full history. While we acknowledge 150 years of the Fiji Corrections Service, this milestone should not be treated as a moment of celebration alone. It must be a moment of reflection and an honest one because after a century and a half, our prisons are still overcrowded and unsafe.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government may celebrate 150 years of corrections, but the simple question is, what has actually been corrected? We heard the honourable Minister talking about the various works done by the honourable Naivalurua when he was the Commissioner at the Fiji Corrections Services and the work that he did was in the Yellow Ribbon Programme. That is a good example of how the institution has evolved over a period of time. However, we continue to see chronic overcrowding.

The Suva Remand Centre built in 2013 by the Bainimarama Government was designed for about 200 offenders. However, it is regularly holding over 280. In Labasa, a facility meant for a few inmates is now holding quite a large number of prisoners. These conditions are not only unsafe, but inhumane. They breed violence, disease, and despair. Madam Deputy Speaker, officials have also admitted that the system cannot cope without major reforms and better coordination across agencies.

Then there is the state of health care. Many inmates enter the system with serious untreated illnesses, HIV, tuberculosis, and chronic conditions. There is still no proper system to ensure medical care follows them from court to prison. This puts both prisoners and staff at risk. Rehabilitation, as the honourable Minister has spoken at length, has been the heart of Corrections Service. And we have seen recidivism rate remains low, which is a sign that there are lower reoffenders after serving their prison term. We need to equip our offenders with the tools they need to reintegrate. For example, anger management, that is very important, life skills, and of course, above all is the community support.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the issue of contrabands continues to expose how fragile prison security really is. Drugs, mobile phones, and other illegal items keep finding their way in. That does not happen by accident. It happens because of systemic weaknesses, corruption, and lack of proper oversight. We also cannot ignore the human side of this crisis, both for inmates and staff. Reports of inhumane treatment continues to surface while the officers themselves are overstretched. And of course, they're also demoralised. We must stop pretending that the passage of time, equals progress. 150 years of correction means nothing if the same problem persists. If prison number keeps increasing, and if we continue to ignore human dignity, we need to fix some of these basic issues faced by our inmates and also the workers at the Correction Services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we now see new types of issues emerging in correction services and we have to correct these issues. Currently, the issues are nepotism and abuse of authority at Corrections Service. The matter is before the tribunal where taxpayers' monies is wasted because of the inability to appoint the right person for the job. There is also misuse of Fiji Corrections Service Welfare and Sports Fund and unfair termination of senior staff. These are also very pertinent issues because if we want the workforce to do their job well, this matter needs to be looked at, and if we do not adopt Open Merit Recruitment process, this is what we end up with. Madam Deputy Speaker, before I take my seat, I can only say that if we really want to deliver justice, then we need to look at all these issues together.

Aitken Spence Plantation Limited Agriculture Initiative in Fiji

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, Assistant Ministers and Members of Parliament, I rise today to inform the august House of a transformative step in our nation's agriculture and economy journey - a partnership that signals a new era of investments, innovation and opportunity for Fiji's people. It is a partnership that blends the best of international expertise with our own national vision for growth, one that places our rural communities, our farmers and our land at the heart of development.

Before I proceed, I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the leadership of honourable Manoa Kamikamica, the former Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communication who has been working with the executive team from Aitken Spence Plantations Pte Limited. His dedication and foresight laid the foundation for what we now see unfolding - a partnership of great promise for our nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Aitken Spence is no stranger to Fiji. Established in 1868, this Sri Lankan corporate leader has a footprint across South Asia, the Middle East, Africa and right here in the South Pacific. It is a name built on 150 years of trust, innovation and sustainability. Through its subsidiary Elpitiya Plantations PLC, the company manages over 8,800 hectares of agricultural estates in Sri Lanka, producing tea, rubber, coconut, cinnamon and oil palm while expanding into renewable energy, commercial forestry, horticulture and ecotourism.

This depth of experience and integrated approach to agribusiness is precisely what Fiji needs as we modernise and diversify our agricultural sector. It is the kind of partnership that brings not just capital, but capability - not just investment, but insight.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the first pillar of this partnership is the Palm Oil Development Project in Vanua Levu, a landmark initiative designed to convert uneconomical lands into productive, high-yield plantations. The project is expected to transform livelihoods in the North. It aims to raise farmers' average annual income from FJ\$2,500 to over FJ\$13,500 per annum while generating export revenue projected to reach US\$125 million per year once fully established.

These are not abstract figures, they represent food on the table, school fees paid, and hope restored for thousands of rural families. At its heart, the project follows a Nucleus Plasma Model, a structure that ensures landowners and local communities remain full partners in development.

- The Nucleus Estate, managed through a joint venture between Aitken Spence and Fijian institutions such as Fiji National Provident Fund, Fijian Holdings, and the Unit Trust will drive processing and export operations.
- The Plasma Farms, managed by local villages and co-operatives, will retain land ownership, access training, and share directly in the profits.

This is not just an investment, it is empowerment. It is about putting ownership, dignity and opportunity back into the hands of our people.

Aitken Spence is also into diversifying with horticulture and high-value crops. Madam Deputy Speaker, complementing this Northern initiative is a pilot horticulture project in Nadi, and this project focuses on introducing high-value crops such as papaya, pineapple, dragonfruit, mangoes, berries, coffee, cinnamon and passionfruit.

The vision is clear — to make Fiji a hub for premium tropical produce in the Pacific, driven by modern farming technology, sustainable practices and value-added processing right here on our shores. By doing so, we strengthen food security, reduce imports and create export-ready agricultural value-chains where every farmer, every processor and every community benefits from shared prosperity.

Partnership for people and planet. What makes this initiative stand out is its commitment to sustainability. Aitken Spence is globally recognised for its environmental stewardship - a principle that aligns perfectly with Fiji's vision for a Green and Blue Economy. The company has pledged to develop only on idle or degraded land, integrate renewable energy into operations, and uphold strict environmental safeguards. This is development with conscience, growth that does not come at the expense of forests, waterways or biodiversity.

It also embraces social responsibility by promoting intercropping of cash crops like papaya and pineapple during palm oil's early years, ensuring farmers have a steady income even before the main crop matures. This is how we redefine the agricultural process, not as extraction, but as regeneration, not as profit for a few, but prosperity for all.

Aitken Spence is also a catalyst for rural transformation. Madam Deputy Speaker, the impact of this partnership will be far-reaching. It will generate thousands of jobs in planting, harvesting, processing, logistics, and marketing. It will drive rural infrastructure - roads, storage, and connectivity- and attract new investment in communities that have long been left behind. The partnership will establish Fiji as a regional model of inclusive agricultural development, built on cooperation, partnership and sustainability.

Aitken Spence has also a vision beyond the horizon. As this initiative takes root, we see before us a broader vision of Fiji as the agricultural innovation hub of the Pacific. A nation that feeds itself, exports to the world, and sustains its people with dignity and pride. The Government will continue to support such partnerships through enabling policies, transparent land frameworks, and targeted investment incentives that prioritise rural development, job creation and food security.

We will continue to empower farmers through cooperatives, micro-enterprises, and training programmes that connect traditional wisdom with modern science. We will continue to protect our environment, because sustainable growth is not an option, it is an obligation for future generations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the partnership between Fiji and Aitken Spence is more than an investment announcement. It is a defining moment for our nation. It is a statement that Fiji is ready to lead not just in tourism and services, but in agriculture, food production, and sustainable enterprise. It reminds us that every great transformation begins with a single seed, planted in faith, nurtured through partnership, and harvested through perseverance.

As we look to the future, let us remember that our greatest resource has always been our people, their hands, their hearts, and their hope. Together we are building a Fiji that grows what it

eats, exports what it grows, and prospers by what it creates. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the Fiji we are cultivating, a nation of opportunity, sustainability, and shared success. May God bless our farmers, our land, and our beloved Fiji.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call upon the designate of the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his reply.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, it is good to note that the honourable Minister of Finance recognises the input of Aitken Spence in Fiji's economy. While we have heard this organisation being criticised, they have totally transformed our Fiji Ports Limited from a loss-making entity to a profitable organisation. Just as a background, those who do not know, Aitken Spence is the same company that is currently operating Fiji Ports.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Just now, just now.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- At least the new honourable Minister of Finance has recognised Aitken Spence importance in now revolving the agriculture sector. Also, I would like to acknowledge the former Minister of Trade, honourable Manoa Kamikamica, though he stands up in Parliament and rubbishes what we have done in the past 16 years, but behind the scene continues with our programmes and policies such as this to showcase himself as a very effective Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative represents a strategic and necessary leap towards Fiji's agriculture sector, providing a robust framework to drive economic growth and enhance food security and ensure climate resilience. It is a major positive step that aligns Fiji's agriculture with global best practices and high-value export markets.

The Aitken Spence Plantation Limited Agriculture Initiative is a catalyst for national prosperity through several key channels. By focusing on the high-value crops and establishing a large-scale, efficient supply chain, the initiative will significantly diversify Fiji's export basket beyond traditional commodities. This promises a substantial increase in foreign exchange, aiming at greater stability for the national economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the partnership brings in world-class technology, investment, and management expertise necessary to modernise Fiji's farming practice. This large-scale commercial approach sets a new benchmark for productivity and equality, which will ultimately benefit the entire agricultural sector. The project has been brought in to provide a major source of stable, high-quality rural employment, moving away from substantive farming towards self-made technical jobs in agronomy, processing, and logistics. This supports the Government's goal of strengthening the private sector engagement in creating sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the initiative will pioneer the scale of climate-resilient farming techniques and sustainable practices. This acknowledged base is crucial for Fiji's long-term food security and will serve as a valuable case study for the entire Pacific region. For the initiative's success to be genuinely transformative, its benefits must be seamlessly integrated and transferred to small-scale farmers. This requires a deliberate, structured approach focusing on three key pillars: technology, finance and marketing access.

Technical assistance and marketing - smallholders need practical hands-on support to transition from traditional methods to commercial farming, high-value farming. Madam Deputy Speaker, establish an outgrower demonstration farm adjacent to the main plantation site. This will serve as a practical classroom for smallholders to learn modern crop management, pest control, and efficient irrigation techniques. Climate-smart extensive extension services - the Government in

partnership with Aitken Spence must establish a dedicated extension service to specifically designate the climate-resilient farming, acknowledge the high-value crop protocols developed by this initiative.

Madam Deputy Speaker, subsidise and provide training on accessible small-scale technologies like hydroponics, precision fertiliser application, and water harvesting system. Smallholders often lack the capital to adapt to new and productive models. Implement a robust contract farming scheme where Aitken Spence provides smallholders with a guaranteed minimum price, quality seeds, and input on credit, which is then deducted upon harvest purchases. This de-risk the transition for a farmer.

Access to low-interest loans - Madam Deputy Speaker, establish a specialised agricultural modernisation revolving credit fund with favourable terms and collateral requirements for farmers committed to adopting the high-value crops. This initiative contract can serve as collateral.

Insurance scheme - that also needs to be done, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Market access and value chain inclusion - the key benefit for smallholders must be reliable, profitable access to export markets. Aitken Spence must commit to integrating smallholder production into their export logistics and processing facilities. This eliminates the burden of seeking distant markets and guarantees access to the international buyers. Provide intensive training and financial assistance for smallholders to meet international food safety and quality certification, allowing their produce to command premium prices as stated by honourable Koya yesterday about bird's eye chilies around \$30, imagine the price of an organic product.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to conclude, farmers' co-operatives need to be established effectively to encourage the resource, the formation of farmers' and landowners' co-operatives to manage input, collective bargaining and pulling of produce, giving smallholders the volume and voice needed to negotiate effectively with the corporate partners. If we form a co-operative involving resource owners and farmers, we can do wonders in terms of agro-marketing. By ensuring this initiative as an inclusive growth engine, one that actively pulls small-scale farmers into modernisation, a high-value export chain, Fiji can achieve both commercial success and broad-based national prosperity.

Trade and Investment Mission to Japan and Fiji's Participation at the Osaka Expo 2025

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament and my fellow Fijians. I wish to inform this august House of Fiji's recent Trade and Investment Mission to Japan and our nation's successful participation at the Expo 2025 held in Osaka, Kansai, Japan - both of which marked important milestones in strengthening Fiji's engagement with Japan and the wider Asia-Pacific region.

I take this opportunity to extend my deep appreciation to the former Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Manoa Kamikamica, for his leadership in spearheading Fiji's delegation to the Expo and the accompanying Trade Investment Mission.

Fiji and Japan shared a long-standing friendship dating back to 1970 - a partnership that has stood the test of time, built on mutual respect, shared values and a common vision for peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

I also extend my warmest congratulations to the newly appointed Prime Minister of Japan, honourable Sanae Takaichi on her historic appointment as Japan's first female Prime Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Trade Investment Mission to Japan held from 20th to 28th September, 2025 was a key component of the Government's economic diplomacy agenda – an agenda designed to expand market access, attract quality investment and strengthen development co-operation. The mission demonstrated the Government's strategic focus on renewable energy, infrastructure, ICT, tourism and agriculture - areas that complement Japan's advanced technology and innovation-driven economy.

Upon arrival in Tokyo, the Fijian delegation was warmly received by Fiji's former Ambassador and Commissioner General for Expo 2025, Mr. Filimone Waqabaca, whose team provided excellent coordination and support throughout the visit.

Key Engagement and Partnerships - Throughout the mission, the delegation engaged with Japanese government ministries, development agencies, private investors and business associations to deepen partnerships and explore areas of mutual interest. The visit to Japan's Agricultural Co-operative provided valuable insights into successful co-operative models that empower rural communities and farmers. These lessons will inform Fiji's ongoing efforts to modernise its co-operative movement for greater inclusivity and productivity. The delegation also visited the Metropolitan Area Outer Underground Discharge Channel, one of the world's most advanced flood mitigation systems - a learning opportunity as Fiji continues to strengthen its own disaster resilience and climate adaptation infrastructure.

Business and Government dialogues - A key event during the mission was the Fiji Trade Investment Promotion Seminar held in collaboration with Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), also with the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

The seminar attracted over 80 participants from government industry, and academia and served as an effective platform to present Fiji as a reliable investment destination. Discussions focused on renewable energy, digital transformation, infrastructure development and tourism. Fiji highlighted its National Digital Strategy, the upcoming Business Service Platform and reforms designed to streamline investment approvals and improve ease of doing business. These initiatives are positioning Fiji as an emerging trade and digital hub of the Pacific.

Bilateral Co-operation - At the bilateral level, engagements with METI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and key private sector partners reaffirmed Japan's strong commitment to supporting Fiji's Sustainable Development Goals. Areas identified for collaboration include:

- (1) Renewable energy and climate resilience infrastructure;
- (2) Digital connectivity and data infrastructure, including submarine cables and cloud sources;
- (3) Agriculture modernization and co-operative development;
- (4) Labour mobility through Japan's Specified Skilled Workers Programme; and
- (5) Tourism promotion and aviation partnerships.

Japan also invited Fiji to participate in the upcoming Pacific Islands Business Partnership Seminar in November 2025, where renewable energy, waste management and agriculture will be the central themes.

Fiji at Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai - The second part of the mission was to represent Fiji at Export 2025 in Osaka. Following the mission, Fiji participated in the Fiji National Day Celebration at the Export 2025 Osaka - a proud moment showcasing Fiji's innovation, resilience and cultural identity.

The Expo themed “*Designing Future Society for Our Lives*” provides an opportunity for Fiji to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability, ocean stewardship, and inclusive growth. Fiji's Pavilion featured displays on renewable energy, tourism, culture and investment - drawing international attention to Fiji's progress and potential.

I extend gratitude to the Primanavia Group for the outstanding cultural performance at the Expo. The *meke* and traditional songs captivated audiences and beautifully represented the spirit, warmth and identity of our people.

People-to-people and Sports Diplomacy - Madam Deputy Speaker, the mission also promoted people-to-people and sports diplomacy through activities such as the Fiji-Japan Golf Tournament and the Bula Fiji Rugby 7s Tournament at Hanazono Stadium. These events celebrated friendship and reinforced the shared values between Fiji and Japan beyond the realm of politics and trade.

The way forward - The outcomes of the mission and Expo participation provide a strong foundation for a new phase in Fiji-Japan co-operation – one focussed on results, innovation and shared prosperity. The Government will now:

- (1) Facilitate follow-up investment discussions with Japan businesses through Investment Fiji;
- (2) Strengthen engagement with the METI and JETRO to develop a structured trade and investment roadmap;
- (3) Advance labour mobility and skills recognition agreements under Japan's SSW programme; and
- (4) Expand Fiji's digital and renewable energy cooperation with Japan through new projects and joint ventures.

I am also pleased to inform the House that as the honourable Prime Minister will be leading the Government delegation in signing the Japan-Fiji *Lomavata* Partnership Agreement with the Government of Japan next month. The Government acknowledges the tireless efforts of the Ministry of Trade, Fiji Embassy in Japan, and the support of METI, JETRO, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, FMF, Vodafone, Fiji Airways, Tourism Fiji, and the Nippon Foundation, among others.

Fiji's engagement in Japan has reaffirmed our nation's place as a trusted and dynamic partner in the Pacific - open for business, ready for investment, and committed to sustainable growth.

The mission laid the groundwork for deeper trade, tourism, and labour cooperation with Japan. It also demonstrated the Government's collective vision to translate global partnership into real benefits for people, more jobs, stronger industries, and better livelihoods for our future.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call upon the designate of the honourable Leader of the Opposition to give the Opposition's reply.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you to the honourable Minister for the update on the Trade and Investment Mission to Japan and Fiji's participation at the Expo 2025. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to the former Minister who asked me to accompany him on this particular trade mission and participation at the Expo, a Member of the Opposition. I thank you, honourable Kamikamica.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend the words that the honourable Minister has just put forward to us and I just wanted to add a few things. In terms of Japan itself, Japan has been a part of

Fiji's development for many, many years. This was another opportunity to further what can be done with respect to the friendship and how they hold us in very high regard with respect to trade and many other development issues that they help with.

I also want to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the members of the Ministry of Trade who have done a phenomenal job with respect to the Expo, and also the Commissioner, who is our very own CEO at FDB, who was the Commissioner for the entire Expo, and also the former Ambassador there – Mr. Filimone Waqabaca. He did a phenomenal job getting the team together and making sure that it was run and organised, and I think Fiji has benefited from them. The diaspora also played a good part in getting this done. There are few names that were mentioned, like the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, et cetera. Tremendous amount of help to the Fiji mission.

In terms of what was achieved, quite a lot, I think it is commendable on the part of the former Minister and the team in respect to furthering Fiji's interests from a development perspective, and all the areas that were spoken of by the honourable Minister were very well seen to by them. I think one of the things that is important to remember is that they have been and still are at the forefront of our development.

One of the things that stood out for me was that they are currently and they spoke a lot about this, wanting to do a lot of work at the airport, affiliation with AFL, to see if AFL can move to another level, or Fiji Airports Limited. There were some serious discussions regarding that. Of course, the different sectors (I am talking about renewable energy) et cetera.

Participation by the Reserve Bank also was there from the Trade and Investment Pacific, part of Investment Fiji, which was well received. As I have said, Japan is an important partner to Fiji. I am glad the honourable Prime Minister will be going along to see what can be done in terms of them being a massive development partner for us, and they have been at the forefront of all of this. It is not just from now, it has been from before.

I say this quite regularly, Denarau would not be Denarau if it was not for the Japanese. They were the ones who developed it in the first place. They have been a very big crucial part of our tourism sector. All of these was showcased at the Expo, which was a tremendous platform for us to use for six months to get this done. They have been a phenomenal part of our tourism industry. Fiji Airways also had a booth there. To get all of that done, some private sector people who were there that did a tremendous job right throughout the six months. I think for the last couple of Expos, Fiji has successfully used that particular platform to further our trade and foreign affairs interests in that particular area.

All in all, honourable Prime Minister, I just wanted to say that we have a phenomenal unit that is currently sitting in Japan, and she happens to be the Charge D'Affaires there, a wonderful candidate for our next ambassador, if she does apply. Her name is Kelera, and she stands in very high regard. Every time anyone has gone there, she has dealt with them very well. She speaks Japanese, knows the lay of the land and she would be a perfect ambassador for us, if she were to apply and if the post is still available.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a very positive result. Once again, a big *vinaka vakalevu* to the Ministry of Trade and to the former Minister for putting Fiji on that particular pedestal.

Fiji Business Excellence Awards

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Members of the Cabinet, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and viewers who are watching through television broadcast live from their comfort zones.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today I rise to share with this honourable House the story of a journey of transformation, growth and unwavering commitment by the Ministry of Youth and Sport in its pursuit of excellence. Before I do that, allow me to express my deepest gratitude for the exceptional support that made it possible for our Fiji National Rugby League to send our talented young *Bulikula* girls to the World Cup Qualifier in Canada. The journey was undoubtedly challenging, especially given the financial constraints we faced due to a lack of sponsorship. However, it was our Government's unwavering determination to the Fiji National Sports Commission that was instrumental in exploring every possible option to ensure the team could participate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these efforts allowed our girls to shine on the international stage, achieving remarkable victories against Canada with a score of 48 to nil and Nigeria with an impressive 62 to 4. The Fiji *Bulikula* team has now qualified for the 2026 World Cup in Australia, and we congratulate them for that.

In 2024, the Ministry made a bold decision to move beyond business as usual and embrace a new culture of performance and innovation. We joined the Fiji Business Excellence Awards and the National Convention on Innovation and Quality, marking the beginning of what we proudly call our “pursuit of excellence journey”.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this was more than an administrative step. It was a declaration of intent, a declaration that the Ministry of Youth and Sports is determined to match the passion of our young people and athletes with the same level of excellence and discipline in how we plan, deliver and measure our work.

Our goal was simple, yet ambitious, to become a model ministry that not only serves, but inspires. One that leads with data driven decision making, embraces innovation, and sets the standard for accountability and service delivery across Government.

Embracing a culture of excellence – Madam Deputy Speaker, at the 2024 Fiji Business Excellence Awards Night, the former President of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere reminded the nation that we live in an era defined by rapid technological change. He noted that advancements such as automation, artificial intelligence and machine learning are reshaping industries worldwide, and Fiji must be prepared to embrace these opportunities. The Ministry of Youth and Sports fully agrees. We see technology and data not as challenges but as opportunities to transform how we operate to optimise resources, improve accuracy and strengthen our impact. In a world where resources are limited, data-driven decisions enable us to focus on what truly matters for the development of our youth and the progress of sports in our nation.

Learning from Global Best Practices: Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji's leadership with the Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) as Chair for the 2025-2026 term has further inspired our Ministry's journey. During the 67th APO Governing Body Meeting, the Chair - Fiji's Permanent Secretary for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations stated that, and I quote: “It is not the size, but the ability of a community to come together and find a way forward that defines success”. This principle is central to our Ministry's transformation. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has embraced this truth, that collective effort, collaboration and shared purpose are the true drivers of excellence.

Investing in People and Process: Madam Deputy Speaker, with the technical guidance of the National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC), our staff underwent structured induction and training to participate effectively in the 2025 Fiji Business Excellence Awards and the National

Convention on Innovation and Quality. We piloted our first Quality Control Circle (QCC) within the National Youth Band, developing and launching the Ministry's Quality Circles Implementation Handbook, a practical guide for sustaining quality and innovation across all our divisions. At the National Convention, our National Youth Band proudly represented the Ministry and was recognised with a One-Star Award, a milestone achievement that symbolises our emerging excellence and commitment to continuous improvement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the transformation we are witnessing is both cultural and operational. Through the Quality Circles initiative, we have shifted from traditional top-down management to a more inclusive participative approach.

During our 2025 Strategic Planning Session, the National Youth Band demonstrated this change mindset by developing its own Strategic Plan and Balanced Scorecard, aligning its objectives with the Ministry's broader strategy and with Fiji's representation at the World Expo 2027, where their Band Leader will serve as the Pavilion Director. This process has nurtured a new way of thinking among our staff, a shift from problem-blindness to problem-consciousness, from silos to collaboration, and from stagnation to continuous improvement. It is a living example of how a culture of excellence can reshape behaviour, build ownership and inspire creativity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we also acknowledge that this journey is not without its challenges. True transformation requires patience, resilience and humility. We continue to nurture our staff, correct mistakes and refine our processes to ensure compliance, transparency and accountability. In fact, as we strive for higher levels of excellence, we often uncover more areas that need improvement. This is not failure, it is the very essence of growth. What was once considered good enough becomes the new challenge to conquer. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is how excellence matures. Our pursuit of business excellence is therefore not a destination, but a continuous journey, one that evolves as we evolve as a Ministry and as a nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to sincerely thank the National Training and Productivity Centre, the Fiji National University and all our development partners, who have supported us on this path. I also pay tribute to all Fijians, public servants, business leaders, educators and community champions who have contributed to building Fiji's national productivity movement. Your dedication to quality and innovation strengthens our collective capacity as a nation.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I call on every ministry, every organisation and every citizen, let us all be champions of excellence and productivity in our respective spheres of influence, whether in government, the private sector or the community, let us adopt the mindset that good is never enough, when better is possible. A productive Fiji begins with productive people, an excellent nation is built by those who never stop improving.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the Ministry for going on this journey of being part of the Fiji Business Excellence Awards and the Awards Framework. The Awards Framework was started by the Fiji National Training Council, and then it is now with the National Training and Productivity Centre.

One of the visions of the Fiji Business Excellence Awards was to create world-class organisations in Fiji, in government, in the private sector, et cetera. It used the framework that came out of the Malcolm Baldrige Award of the United States of America which had 7 criteria, Madam Deputy Speaker.

- (1) Leadership, visionary leadership, leadership based on values, leadership that has high expectations of those that work in the organisation.

- (2) A major focus of strategic planning, the idea that you have to understand your environment and plan, move forward.
- (3) Customer focus.
- (4) Management by fact. You cannot manage what you cannot measure. That is a very fundamental principle in the Business Excellence Awards.
- (5) Human resource and process management with a very strong focus on a system perspective, realizing that whatever you do within an organization, you cannot just do – cannot just focus on what you do as an organization. You need to look at the whole system and how it operates together. A systems perspective of looking at things and the idea that this will then – and that if you're able to manage your process as well, keep improving your process, using the tools that the honorable Minister has talked about - the quality circles, 5S, the Kaizen, ISO 9000, the business process management, all of these things help you to build a culture of improvement.

One of the good things that we had, Madam Deputy Speaker, when the former Member of Parliament, Mr. Anare Jale was the Permanent Secretary, he adopted the idea of the Business Excellence Awards, and they created the 7 Excellence Awards for all of the government ministries. Then they got all the government ministries to use these principles to be able to manage, and they had an annual award function.

I think, given that some ministries have done it, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs did it a few years ago, now the Ministry of Youth and Sport. If we want to be able to build our civil service up, this is a good way to do it. We now have Fiji Learning Institute of Public Service (FLIPS). I think that will be a great place to put this idea of bringing in the Service Excellence Award. It is all about systemic thinking about how you approach programmes. A lot of times when you look at problems, you just look at isolated problems.

We need to have a more systemic approach to it, and I believe that if we can do that, have this framework that is being proven over time, it is still being run by the Fiji National University. There was that framework that was adapted to suit our government ministries, and similar things have been done in other countries, like Singapore, for instance, where they have these award systems. These frameworks can raise the performance of all organisations in Fiji.

I think this weekend they have the awards night down in Sheraton, I would encourage the honourable Prime Minister to consider this idea of Service Excellence Awards Framework, this was something that we had in the past.

One of the things I noticed, Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes annual reports come and we some annual reports, we had one in our report, for this year and then for that year but not for this. The we asked, what happened? Because those who were in that organisation had had their data at that time, had left, but when you have an excellent system, that data is always there. There are systemic ways of capturing information so if someone walks out, people are there who can continue the job.

This is what I am talking about - systemic perspective. These are the kinds of things that are covered in this Awards Framework, and I would commend to the House and to the honourable Prime Minister to seriously think about this Fiji Business Excellence Awards a Service Excellence Awards framework that can be used by government ministries that can once again be run from the public service as it was done a few years ago.

International Day of the Girl Child

HON. S. KIRAN.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of Parliament - *ni sa yadra vinaka saka*, greetings to all who have joined us this session virtually.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to join the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports in congratulating our Fiji Bulikula team both for qualifying for the IRL Rugby League World Cup next year. This is greatly inspiring for young women in future.

The International Day of the Girl Child is commemorated on 11th October and focuses attention on the need to address challenges girls face in our homes and our communities. For the first time this year, our Ministry marked the day to create awareness on the needs, challenges and potential of our young girls. It is a special day and reminds us that our girls are not waiting to become Fiji's future. They are already shaping our present. Everyday, they are leading, innovating and breaking barriers.

It is a celebration of girls as innovators, leaders, as sportswomen and change agents in our communities. This commemoration serves to amplify their voices and pushes for the inclusion in research, policy and development plans. The day calls on everyone to stand with girls and invest in a future that believes in the agency and potential.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the celebration of girl child also draws attention to the inequalities and dangers many girls face due to the gender. This includes barriers to education, healthcare and protection from violence. Recent statistics shared by the honourable Assistant Minister for Health, painted a sobering picture. In just the first six months of this year, eight girls under the age of 15 years became mothers, while another 481 girls aged between 15 years and 19 years gave birth. In total, 850 teenage pregnancies were recorded in 2024, including 17 girls under the age of 15 years. These are not just statistics, these are our children, our girls who should be in classrooms, not in delivery wards. Between 2020 and 2024, 7,283 crimes were reported against children in Fiji and 5,085 of these, that is 70 percent involved girls. Adolescent girls of age 13 to 17 are the most affected, accounting for nearly 69 percent of all child crime victims.

The majority of these are sexual offences - rape, defilement and sexual assault. This means too many of our girls are not safe, not even in their own homes. The Western and Southern Divisions record the highest number of cases, but rural communities in the North and East also face serious risks. Technology facilitated violence causes additional higher risks to our young girls. These numbers are not acceptable. No child should live in fear of abuse in our country. No girl should lose opportunity to grow to her full potential.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to draw attention to these issues, our Ministry in partnership with the Ministry of Education and other agencies, coordinated divisional activities across our communities. In the Central Division, Nakavika Primary School in Namosi celebrated the day with parents, teachers and village elders. In the Northern Division, Labasa College, Holy Family and Bethel Primary School came together to organise various activities. In the Eastern Division, activities were organised across Kadavu's three districts - Tavuki, Nabukelevu and Yale, reaching 27 villages. In the Western Division, Koroipita held awareness and empowerment programme for its community.

The programmes featured awareness sessions, and discussions on teenage pregnancy, early marriage, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, leadership, and sports inclusion. Student oratory contests brought out powerful narrations on challenges faced by our young girls but also showed their potential in critical thinking and leadership. Key partners included the Fiji Police Force, Medical

Services Pacific, National Fire Authority, and the Fiji Sports Commission. There were fun activities for learning, opportunities for counselling and support and more importantly, availability of information on how to seek assistance if in need. Community elders, teachers, students and stakeholders had focussed discussions on creating opportunities for growth of girl child in each of these communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we all know that education is one of the greatest tools for empowerment. Yet, data shows that many of our girls are still falling through the cracks. In rural areas, school dropout rate between Year 8 and Year 12 is almost 40 percent, compared with a national average of 20 percent. According to the FEMIS Term 3 data for 2024, 73,295 girls are enrolled in primary school compared to 79,240 boys - a 6.5 percent gap that has remained consistent over the past five years. At the secondary level, 7,554 girls remain in Year 12, but dropped to around 5,258 in Year 13. As girls reach senior levels, thousands seem to drop out of the school system. While large numbers of boys also seem to be dropping out, many eventually go to vocational or employment opportunities.

When girls drop out of school, they face severe consequences including reduced earnings, lower standards of living, and a higher risk of early marriage and childbearing. Other impacts include poorer health outcomes, less agency in household and community decisions, and a cycle of limited opportunities for themselves and their children. For too long these uncomfortable truths have been ignored and potential lost, we have to confront these challenges head-on, Madam Deputy Speaker. With the support of our partners, parents and community leaders, the hope is that we build a strong network of protection and empowerment for every Fijian girl across the nation.

Through the Coalition Government's integrated approach, we are strengthening child protection systems, enhancing community awareness, and ensuring that girls have access to both education and health services. This is being done through expanding family and community counselling services, integrating school-based awareness on safety, health, and leadership, and strengthening co-ordination between the police, medical professionals, social welfare, and schools for faster response to cases of abuse and neglect.

Through our divisional engagements, girls and communities have called for continuous campaigns in schools and villages. There has been request for education materials in vernacular languages, leadership training for girls, and stronger linkages between schools, health, and protection services. In response, we are now in discussion with the Ministry of Education to make the International Day of the Girl Child a permanent feature on Fiji's national school and empowerment calendar.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank Ministry of Education, all participating schools, community leaders, service providers and stakeholders for coming together to commemorate this special day. This year, while we have just started, so it was not select communities, but we hope we can build on it for nationwide awareness and campaigns in the coming year. Our message is simple - every Fijian girl matters and deserves protection and opportunity to grow to their full potential. May God bless our children, may God bless our girls.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Now, I give the floor to the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for her statement on the International Day of the Girl Child. This is very personal, Madam. Every father in this Parliament and across Fiji shares the same wish. We want the absolute best for our daughters. They are our princesses. Their future success is our most urgent national duty. We are driven by love,

protection and prayer that they will achieve more than we ever did. The honourable Minister calls on us to invest in a future that believes in our girls' agency and potential.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our girls have done their part. I am a very proud father of three daughters and our daughters are delivering. They are smarter, they are finishing school, and they are graduating at higher rates than our sons. Data shows that high school completion for girls reaches up to 97 percent compared to 79 percent for boys. This is where the national story turns tragic.

The moment our daughters leave the classroom, they are met with a betrayal of potential. This is the failure government must answer to. We have the best educated generation of young women in our history, but we allow their talent to be served by old beliefs that a woman's place is only in the home. We have a saying which is beautiful and true, "Give a woman a house and she will turn it into a home". I agree.

Our women turn houses into homes through love and sacrifice, but our national statistics show that the government's failure to address key policy gaps is what enforces this expectation. How? By failing to provide affordable, quality, national childcare. This policy gap ensures that the responsibility for care falls amongst entirely on women, who spend nearly three times more hours on unpaid care work than men.

This lack of support is the structural barrier that keeps the female labour force participation rate locked at a mere 36.2 percent. The female labour force gap is 30 percentage points. Our girls are twice as likely to be out of the formal workforce as our sons. This is not a social issue, it is an economic crisis. The World Bank confirms that closing this gender employment gap by unblocking women's time would boost Fiji's GDP per capita by a massive 30 percent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our daughters are 30 percent economic powerhouse that this government is refusing to administer. We need a commitment in the budget, not just a plan. We talk about women's leadership, but female representation in this Parliament remains crucially low. When civil society and women's advocates call for structural change to bring women to the decision-making table, prominent voices within the government call it tokenistic. How can we look our daughters in the eye and tell them to lead our nation when the men in this House oppose the very measures designed to ensure their place at the highest level of decision-making? This is the hypocrisy we must end.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to address every father and every son listening to this debate today. The honourable Minister's statement reminds us that we have a moral duty, not just as politicians but as men to dismantle the barriers that prevent our daughters from achieving the excellence they have earned. We can argue about policy and budgets all day, but the root of the problem is in the heart. My daughters, your daughters, all of Fiji's daughters are worthy of more than three times the labour and half the economic opportunity. The foundation of the future is simple. We must teach our sons to love and respect our daughters and to stand with them, not once a year, but every single day. Only when we stand together, men and women, fathers and daughters, in mutual love and respect can we see a better, more prosperous Fiji for our children who deserve a better Fiji.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- On that note, honourable Members, would you just join me in a round of applause for the Bulikula Women's Rugby League side.

(Acclamation)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, it is 20 past 12, and as I have not received any communications from the Madam Secretary-General, we will continue on.

Outcome and Strategic Direction of the 9th Pacific Tuna Forum

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, viewers tuning in live on Parliament's *Facebook* channel, *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to deliver my statement to inform the House about the successful convening of the 9th Pacific Tuna Forum under the transformative theme “*Pacific Tuna 2050 - Resilience, Innovation, Equity and Sustainable Trade for a Prosperous Future*”. The event held at the Sofitel Fiji Resort from the 14th to 15th October showcased regional co-operation and solidarity and most importantly reaffirmed Fiji's position on Ocean Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries Management.

The 9th Tuna Forum brought together in unity fisheries experts, policy makers, industry leaders, academics, development partners and community representatives from across the Pacific and the globe. Fiji, as the co-host with the government of Papua New Guinea reaffirmed the regional shared goal and commitment to the sustainable management of our shared tuna stock which is vital to the social and economic well-being of Pacific Island people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, partnering with INFOFISH, an intergovernmental organisation based in Malaysia, highlights that our shared tuna stock is not only crucial to the socio economic well-being of our people, but its long-term viability and sustainability also has wide-reaching global impacts in trade markets, food security, poverty alleviation, wealth creation and climate change. The Western & Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) which Fiji is party to, accounts for nearly 60 percent of the global tuna harvest. The status of the shared tuna stocks in the WCPO, such as skipjack, big eye, yellowfin and the South Pacific albacore tuna remains healthy, not overfished and is not subject to overfishing. Therefore, the stock status in the WCPO not only indicates effective fisheries management and robust scientific monitoring but also demonstrates strong regional cooperation.

With that being said, Fiji has always been at the forefront of the region's sustainable efforts with the implementation of specific management measures that ensure the protection of the region's shared tuna stocks. Some of these measures include the:

- (1) establishment of the Fiji National Quota and License Cap;
- (2) demarcation of closed areas;
- (3) use of specific gears and mitigation methods to prevent incidental catch;
- (4) protection of endangered shark species; and
- (5) protection of turtles, marine mammals, and cetaceans, et cetera.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the last 10 years, WCPO catch average has been about 2.7 million metric tonnes. Of this, 1.5 million metric tonnes are from waters of the 17 members of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). Of the volume of tuna caught in the FFA waters, only about 214,000 metric tonnes are actually processed in the FFA countries. In contrast, most of the tonnage which accounts for 86 percent of the total catch in the FFA waters of member countries is taken offshore for processing.

Fiji has been fortunate that out of the 17 developing states in the region, we have been able to lead the quest of being able to invest on shore-based processing establishments to value-add products and export tuna caught within our waters as a Fijian product.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with our ongoing shared vision and determination, Fiji as a domesticated tuna industry has been able to get equitable market shares in competing destinations across Japan, USA, and the European Union. On the other hand, when raw materials are exported offshore for processing, we miss out on job opportunities, equitable wealth creation and the transfer of technology and wealth.

The Ministry of Fisheries recognises the importance of hosting the 9th Pacific Tuna Forum which provides a platform for key experts, policy makers, development partners and industries to engage in effective dialogue and meaningful collaboration to strengthen and make the tuna industry more equitable. The 9th Pacific Tuna Forum provided an opportunity for the Ministry of Fisheries to learn and understand the global tuna supply chain and identify new entry points into the competitive global tuna market to help shape our national strategies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Tuna Forum also allowed Fiji to showcase the spirit of partnership and cooperation that defines our Pacific identity and the global influence on our tuna. The number of registered participants reached 430 from the targeted number of 300, confirming that the Pacific Tuna Forum remains the leading platform for dialogue, cooperation and strategic engagement on the tuna industry in the Pacific. The deliberation centred on four key pillars:

- (1) Resilience through adaptive management of our tuna resources;
- (2) Innovation in involving, embracing new technologies, digital solutions and scientific advances to enhance sustainability and efficiency;
- (3) Equity, ensuring that Pacific Island communities, particularly those most dependent on fisheries, derive fair and inclusive benefits; and
- (4) Sustainable trade fostering market systems that reward responsible fishing and contribute to long term economic growth.

Available dialogue and information will help re-strategise our development inspirations and provide a strategic direction to transform the fisheries sector. With regional cooperation and support from FFA and SPC and our development partners, the primary focus is increasing the value of retaining tuna caught in our waters so it can be processed locally and sold in the main export market for equitable market shares and as a product of individual members. This ongoing initiative will contribute to our development inspirations of creating employment opportunities and building a stronger economy. As the Pacific hub, Fiji has a significant advantage with easy access to trade destinations, a profitable niche and access to new markets.

To realise this, Madam Deputy Speaker, the focus is now to invest in the tuna value chain including high value seafoods as it presents an opportunity for a stronger and resilient economy. Please allow me to re-emphasise that Fiji has one of the most developed tuna value chains among FFA member countries. We have built a fully domesticated long line fishing fleet, onshore processing facilities and a thriving domestic fishing industry. We catch from our long line fishery primarily consisting of South Pacific albacore are landed, processed and sold according to market standards, making a name for Fiji in the world 's competitive tuna market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the 9th Tuna Forum also created a space and platform to present and market Fijian caught and produced fisheries products which is essential to the industry 's growth. It further provided the opportunity for Fiji's tuna industry to benefit from valuable networking, knowledge exchange on market and trade, technological innovation and social and environmental commitment that contributes to the transformation of the fisheries sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we had the opportunity to maximise economic returns, explore diversification opportunities, increase market access and attract new investments to contribute to our national development aspirations. To achieve this, the Ministry of Fisheries is working to realise our national goals and strategies, aligning with the National Development Plan 2025 to 2029 and Vision 2050 in collaboration with our FFA and our development partners.

One key priority is improving supporting services such as infrastructure and coaching to boost Fiji as a fisheries and maritime hub in the Pacific. Fiji's identification as one of the hubs under the Hub and Spoke Model within FFA member countries is intended to create the opportunity to trade within our region and also address the challenges of raw materials to support our processing facilities.

As a responsible ministry, we wish to extend our sincere appreciation to the Coalition Government for its confidence and for the budgetary provision of \$562,500 that ensured Fiji's successful hosting of the 9th Pacific Tuna Forum, which enabled the Ministry to deliver the forum effectively, reflecting the Government's commitment to advancing regional co-operation and reinforcing Fiji's leadership on Fisheries Management and Ocean Conservation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the successful convening of the Pacific Tuna Forum is a clear indication that through collaboration, solidarity and a shared vision, the Pacific region can continue to protect, develop and sustain its tuna resources for the long-term benefit of our people. The Ministry of Fisheries remains firmly committed to this cause, driven by a deep passion for our ocean, people and communities. And as we look ahead, we do so with confidence and conviction that we can continue to build a future where we capture greater returns from processing, marketing and branding our own products.

Before I take my seat, I would like to wish my son, Sakiusa and his Year 13 classmates at Queen Victoria School all the best with their Chemistry paper this afternoon, their last paper in the Year 13 Examination, also marking the end of their external exams in the secondary school journey. I also remember the Year 13 students in schools across Fiji who are also completing their Year 13 exams this week.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Join me honourable Members in wishing all our students right around the country all the very best in all the exams that they are sitting currently.

I now call upon the designate of the honourable Leader of the Opposition, who I think is going to be Honourable Koroilavesau to reply.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I will address you as Madam Speaker while you preside in the Chair. I think it is just right and fair.

Madam Speaker, this regional platform encompasses diverse global voices advocating for sustainable and prosperous tuna industry within the Western Central Pacific Ocean.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Minister has outlined major issues that were discussed and the direction that the Pacific Tuna Forum would take going into the future. Her statement included the opportunity to understand the global tuna supply chain, the identification of entry points into global tuna trade market and improving support services such as infrastructure and cold chain to boost Fiji as a maritime hub in the Pacific.

Madam Speaker, Pacific Tuna 2015 Resilience produces equity and sustainable trade for a prosperous future. As the honourable Minister has alluded to, it was held at Sofitel Fiji Resort and Spa in Denarau. I understand, when she stood up to present her Statement this morning, the

governments of Papua New Guinea and Fiji were joint hosts for the conference. I thank her for the detailed statement, but for the benefit of those without the background of the tuna industry, I think it is important to highlight the three packages that she discussed this morning.

Firstly, the relationship between the different sectors in the production and marketing of tuna within the Pacific, and especially Fiji, being the central focus for the South Pacific and within the WCO sector. First, it involves the fishermen who control and dominate this sector, the fishing firms that supply and dominate the region. Then come the firms that control the fish that have been caught in the region. With that, we are talking about Bumble Bee, Chicken of the Sea, and StarKist. They are the ones who dictate the price and distribute tuna all over the world.

As the honourable Minister has said, they control around about 60 percent to 80 percent of tuna in the market. Then you have firms that control and dominate the region. You have Tri Marine Group, Fong Chun Formosa (FCF) which runs PAFCO in Levuka, and then you have Itochu Corporation (the Japanese company.)

These fishing firms that supply branded manufacturers with raw material dispersed across the globe basically have ownership but are highly fragmented at the level of competition that they run within this industry. I am glad that the honourable Minister this morning highlighted Fiji's pivotal position within the region because of its position within the South Pacific and the development that exists, that have already existed in port facilities. With PAFCO, we should be able to go into the future and be comfortable that we will be one of the major players in this industry.

I also thank the honourable Minister for continuing to put Fiji as the leader in the South Pacific and within the Western Pacific Ocean of interest for the tuna industry and tuna fishing. She highlighted that the proposed attendees were supposed to be 200, but 340 attended this Cconference. This highlights the importance of Fiji and the importance of the tuna industry within our economy.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we adjourn for lunch, I just want to remind honourable Members of the House Committee that your meeting is at the Small Committee Room immediately after we adjourn. At this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.36 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.48 p.m.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Point of Order – Honourable Jone Usamate

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed to item six on our Order Paper, I believe I have a ruling to deliver on a point of order that was raised by honourable Jone Usamate this morning. The Point of Order was made pursuant to Standing Order 125(3). Let me clarify from the beginning that the Point of Order raised does not qualify under the remit of Standing Order 125(3) as the matter in question relates to the withdrawal or the withdrawn motion and not the determination of the Business Committee.

The matter in question relates to a motion for debate on Monday's Order Paper, and for the information of the honourable Members, the Secretary-General received instructions that the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs was withdrawing his third motion on Monday's Order Paper.

Honourable Members will note that the process for any withdrawal of motions is governed by Standing Order 46 (4) and does not, in anyway, necessitate the determination of the Business Committee under Standing Order 125(3). So, the withdrawal of the motion by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs is, in my view in order and fully complies with the requirements outlined under Standing Order 46 (4) and in that respect, I hereby rule that the Point of Order raised by the honourable Jone Usamate is not tenable and is out of order. That is the ruling of the Chair.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Estimated Tonnage of Standing Cane - Rarawai Mill (Question No. 220/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on the current estimated tonnage of cane remaining to be harvested in the Rarawai Mill area?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for this question. As of 30th October, the estimated balance of cane remaining to be harvested in the Rarawai mill area, which also includes Penang mill area, stands at approximately 194,440 tonnes out of the total seasonal estimate of 607,000 tonnes. This means that about 32 percent of the total crop remains unharvested, while 68 percent, equivalent to 412,560 tonnes, has already been harvested in the Rarawai mill area.

Mr. Speaker Sir, for the comparison, the Lautoka mill currently has an estimated 47,760 tonnes of cane yet to be harvested out of 346,500 tonnes, representing approximately 14 percent of the crop still standing.

Currently, the Lautoka Mill is crushing about 25,000 tonnes per week and after the September

fire, we are transferring an average of 2,400 tonnes of cane daily to Rarawai and Lautoka mills. To-date, a total of 74,494 tonnes of cane has been transferred from Rarawai to Lautoka for processing, costing the Government an additional \$1,117,410 in total.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the decisive action taken by this Government to provide \$15 transportation assistance to the farmers transferring cane from the Rarawai mill area to the Lautoka mill, together with the directive to the Fiji Sugar Corporation to adopt a pragmatic quota distribution approach not only ensures an equitable allocation of quotas between the two mills, but also prioritises manual gains with available canecutters to retain them to safeguard their livelihoods, has greatly elevated the transportation burden of growers and ensured the continuity of harvesting operations, despite the temporary closure of Rarawai mill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also bring to the attention of this august House that there are limitations to what Government can and cannot do and equally important is the role played by our growers. To-date, a total of 425 growers comprising 175 from Lautoka Mill area and 250 from Rarawai Mill area have not yet commenced harvesting a single stalk of cane this season. These growers belong to 69 gangs, representing an estimated 12,915 tonnes of cane that remain unharvested.

While many, honourable Members on the other side including, honourable Pillay, appear more concerned about what the Government is doing, I urge them to direct the same level of concern towards what is happening on the ground rather than spending time on social media and sensitising the issues they should go out to the farms.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- ... sit with the growers, share a cup of tea or coffee and bread with them on their farms, not in Lautoka City but encourage and assist our farmers to begin harvesting.

As we anticipate Rarawai Mill to resume crushing on 1st of December, we are confident that this all will accelerate the remaining harvesting operations and enable farmers to deliver the balance of their cane before the end of the season, probably before the rainy season sets in. This demonstrates our Government's firm commitment to supporting canefarmers during the selling period, maintaining mill performance, safeguarding the livelihoods of the industry workers and ensuring the overall stability and resilience of the sugar industry.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, sugarcane farmers are facing a number of challenges due to the fire at the Rarawai Mill in September. One of the biggest cost factors is the burnt-cane penalty deduction due to the late issuance of quota and the poor performance of Lautoka Mill. My supplementary question to the honourable Minister is, what is the Ministry of Sugar doing to assist farmers in this regard?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question is asking about what is left to be harvested. That is totally a new question, and I will answer it in the next session.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the response by the honourable Minister and considering the weather pattern that we have, it is unlikely that all canes will be harvested. I just want to ask, honourable Minister, is there any provision for compensation for all those farmers whose canes will not be harvested? This is in relation to the substantive question.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker Sir, rain, hurricane or cyclone is not controlled by me. It is controlled by God. If it happens, we will then decide.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, you do not control the weather, but the Government controls the money. So, you better give it to the farmers. The honourable Minister has suggested for us to go and have tea and bread with them. I would like to know from the honourable Minister, when was the last time he shared a cup of tea and bread with the farmers in Ba because when I was in Ba, I was told that he only went to the mill, and he is avoiding the farmers. So, when was the last time you sat with the gang in Ba?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Opposition Leader has not been to Ba lately. He only went there to register his party but did not get any signatures. I have been drinking tea and coffee with all the farmers for the last 10 trips I made to Ba.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for your answers. I have a very simple question. If that 191,000 leftover tonnage that you are actually talking about from that particular area is to be processed in Latoka, will Latoka be able to process it? Do they have the capacity to do it?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I just said that the Latoka Mill is currently crushing at 2,500 tonnes per day and the Rarawai Mill is hopefully starting on the first week of December and we should be able to finish crushing all.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the current challenges and slow harvesting, is the FSC able to meet its fourth quota deadline?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think he cannot hear what I am saying. We will make sure we crush it. We'll do it fullstop.

MR. SPEAKER.- It was remiss of me not to acknowledge and thank the Deputy Speaker, honourable Qereqeretabua for ably, as usual, conducting the affairs of Parliament this morning – thank you.

Access Finance for MSMEs
(Question No. 221/2025)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises update Parliament on how the Ministry is creating pathways for alternative forms of fundraising or access to finance for MSMEs?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Member for the question. Before I proceed, I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude, the leadership of honourable Kamikamica, the former Minister, responsible for MSMEs and the leadership team on this initiative.

Access to finance for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises or MSMEs has come a long way, but our journey is far from complete. Through strategic initiatives by the government and various institutions, we are building a more inclusive ecosystem that gradually breaks down barriers, barriers needed for collateral, geographical isolation and access to formal credit.

In March this year, Parliament unanimously passed the Access to Business Finance Act, and this landmark legislation creates new and innovative ways for businesses, including MSMEs to raise funds. For your information, it was an Act that was passed with tremendous support from both sides of the House, after it went through the bipartisan economic sub-committee.

The first mechanism of raising funds is Small Offers. Small Offers is basically a private company issues equity securities or shares to up to 48 investors, raising no more than \$2 million in total, with a retail investor limit of \$20,000 each in any 12-month period.

The second mechanism is crowdfunding, which provides a way of raising money on a proven online platform to fund businesses, including MSMEs.

The third, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is Debt Crowdfunding, which is a peer-to-peer lending platform service that matches lenders, eligible business borrowers, including traders, partnerships and cooperative businesses offering debt securities. Total amount raised should not exceed \$5 million in any 12-month period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, hence for any business whether starting, growing, expanding or diversifying, access to capital is essential. Around the world, one of the greatest challenges businesses face is securing the financing they need. There are numerous ways for businesses, both large and small, formal or informal, to raise funds and these are important avenues. It is vital that we create clear and effective pathways for MSMEs to access finance and that means developing, innovating financing mechanisms tailored to their needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to enact the legislation, an implementation taskforce was set up, bringing together the regulator the Reserve Bank of Fiji, technical partners, Asian Development Bank and the MSME Council, among others. This taskforce has been developing regulations, designing the mechanism for small offers and crowdfunding, and conducting awareness and education initiatives to start with.

The Cabinet has already approved access to business funding, small offer regulation, which is now with the Office of the Solicitor-General. The intention is to roll out implementation in phases, beginning with small offers and then progressively introducing the equity, and then the last would-be debt crowdfunding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the regulation, there are three levels of investors, the:

- (1) retail investors;
- (2) sophisticated investors; and
- (3) wholesale investors.

There are limits for those three levels of investors. These limits are safeguards to protect investors and uphold the integrity of the small mechanism to start with. Importantly, a small offer is not a Government grant or a subsidy. It is an avenue that allows private companies to raise capital by offering shares to known parties or institutions, something never before available in Fiji.

A notable example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is how the mechanism can be used. Say, the *Tokatoka Namara PTE Limited* in Nadi have successfully engaged in gravel extraction on community-owned land. Through this reform, *Tokatoka Namara PTE Limited* will be able to raise funds for the expansion of its business. This shows how resource owners can use the mechanism to increase capital, expand operations, and ensure long-term sustainability.

The small offer regime is seen as a bridge for MSMEs to move to become a private company to raise funds through those levels of investors, including the financial institutions, and to unlock financing opportunities. This was previously a privilege for larger companies raising capital through the South Pacific Stock Exchange.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lesson from Malaysia. While activating this component of the Act, a study tour was carried out in Malaysia, and that is to examine the alternative financing ecosystem. The delegation, including the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Fiji Investment Corporation Ltd, South Pacific Stock Exchange, SOLE Fintech and the Asian Development Bank's Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative.

Malaysia's success demonstrated that sustained growth in MSMEs financing requires strong coordination between regulators, Government agencies, and the private sector. What was important to note was that the top-down, whole-of-economy approach offers valuable lessons for Fiji. A key takeaway was the importance of education, managing expectations, and awareness. That is why we are committed to providing the necessary guidance and support.

The way forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the task force is now working towards the development of a suitable Fiji-appropriate intermediary platform to facilitate either debt and equity crowdfunding. The Government remains committed to ensuring that MSMEs have access to the financial resources they need to thrive, innovate, and contribute to economic activity.

Through the Access to Business Funding Act and its phased rollout, we are building a more inclusive and progressive financing landscape, one that empowers entrepreneurs, attracts investment and drives sustainable growth for all Fijians. The MSME Fiji unit within the Ministry of Trade is leading this innovative financing solution in collaboration with RBF and ADB.

I thank this august House for its support as we continue to advance Fiji's economic future. If you or those listening have any questions with regard to this reform, you can contact the MSME Fiji Helpline on 163 or the ministry responsible for cooperative MSMEs. As stated in my response, it is a work in progress.

HON. RATU. J.B NIUDAMU.- What is the purpose of the Access to Business Funding Act and what benefits will it bring to the MSMEs?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- I have mentioned a bit of the answer in my response, however, as I mentioned, it was to unlock new innovative financial solutions for MSMEs and for those that require access to finance, that is, to be able to start, grow, and sustain their business. The funding through commercial banks which do not offer MSME-friendly or MSME-tailored products and services, such as low-interest rate, collateral-free, and unsecured lending, to name a few. This access to funding facilities will help those MSMEs. Furthermore, the cost of borrowing for the MSMEs is high, and collateral requirements are stringent if you go to any financial institution, including the banks.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Minister, is the Government working with the commercial banks to ease loan requirements for small businesses, and what role does the FDB play in this?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- That is a new question by the honourable Member.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thought the question by honourable Niudamu was also new, but obviously the reply was prepared. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our people, our diaspora overseas contribute a lot of money to people in this country. A lot of it is sent as remittances, and a lot of it is used in consumption. Obviously, I would like to know whether the scheme that you have allows them to also contribute to crowdfunding, because if they are able to do that, that money would not be used in consumption. It could then be used to generate income and livelihoods.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- I do not want to pre-empt the work of the Committee on those,

but those points and issues have been taken into account by the Committee in finalising the framework.

Special Administrators in Suva and Nadi
(Question No. 222/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament on why the Special Administrators in Suva and Nasinu are still acting as Chief Executive Officers and what is the timeline for appointing substantive CEO's?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this question is not supposed to be asked in this august House. The reason is that it is an internal and operational issue, and it is a petty question. The municipalities have their own Government structures, own policies that govern the recruitment for all these CEOs and whoever they want to hire within the organisation.

HON. P.D. KUMAR - Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is so disappointing. As an honourable Minister for Local Government, he does not even know his role. He appoints the Special Administrators in all towns and cities, and they appoint themselves as Acting CEOs. You can see the conflict of interest, and not only in those two municipal councils, but there are eight municipal councils without CEOs, and they are all failed politicians who are appointed there.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- When you talk about clean-up, you start from there. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is, what measures does the honourable Minister intend to implement to prevent similar delays in future CEO appointments in municipal councils across Fiji?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to advice this august House, as a former Minister for Housing and Local Government, when she appointed the CEO for the Suva City Council, the contract was never signed from 2019 until the CEO was changed in April 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we came in, concurrence with all the 13 municipalities, we engaged two recruitment agencies to help in the recruitment and hiring of all CEOs in all 13 municipalities. They are KPMG as well as Maxumise.

To date, from these 13 municipalities, we have already done the recruitment for all 10 municipalities except for two. Suva is going to be happening soon, as well as Labasa. One of the major criteria is to answer your question when it comes to the appointment and hiring of these very important positions:

- (1) They must have a qualification.
- (2) They must be competent as well as have the necessary experience to lead organisations. A good example is organisations like Suva. They need a very good, qualified person who understands finance. Who can manage big municipalities as well as big municipalities like Nasinu.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, section 9(a) of Local Government Act was repealed in 2024. I want to ask the honourable Minister under what powers the Acting Chief Executive Officers were appointed, who were also the Special Administrators because that is a conflict of interest. I just need to know under what powers.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we did as a Ministry, before we appointed these current Special Administrators to be Acting CEOs, we sought the assistance as well as the opinion of the Solicitor-General's Office. From that opinion, we formed the basis of why we engaged some of these current Special Administrators and some of these Council members to act as CEOs for these municipalities.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please note that Oral Question 223/2025 has dropped, as it has been addressed in the Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Agriculture.

(Oral Question 223/2025 dropped)

Administrative Measures – External Examinations
(Question No. 224/2025)

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

Can the honourable for Minister for Education inform Parliament on the administrative measures put in place by the Ministry to ensure external examinations are conducted fairly?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to advise the honourable Member that the administration of external exams is clearly stipulated in the policies of examinations and assessment of the Ministry and it is publicly available, which he could have accessed when was in the Ministry. Again, to answer the question, it is on the website.

The policy clearly states in 6.1 the administration of external examinations and 6.2 states the registration of examination, index numbers, examination scripts, examination details, the subjects offered and all the information regarding the conduct of examination.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am fully aware of the policy, but I think the people are not aware. That is the very reason why cheating in national examinations is on the rise and this threatens to undermine the credibility of Fiji's education system.

Last year, there were cases of cheating and I think the honourable Minister is fully aware of that. My question to honourable Minister is what mechanisms are in place to monitor examination centres during external exams to ensure that invigilators uphold examination integrity, and what steps are taken to safeguard the confidentiality of examination papers before the exam date?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the incidents of cheating is probably from his time and if he can give us clear clarification of the details of that because it happened 10 years ago and he said it is still happening, so give us the details and we will attend to it. Are these allegations of cheating?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is, what support is given to schools in rural and maritime areas to ensure equal exam conditions?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Can you just clarify, please? Are you saying that examinations are done outside of the classroom?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will repeat my question. What support is given to schools in rural and maritime areas to ensure equal exam conditions?

MR. SPEAKER.- Did you get the last bit of the question?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, everything is detailed about the examination. As all other honourable Members of this House have gone through examinations and we are all aware of the conditions. If you are specifically asking for unusual weather conditions, we can give details, otherwise it is normal conditions. We give examination supervisors, test papers and certain rules, as honourable Kumar would be fully aware of.

In terms of examiners, there are candidates for examiners, rules for examiners, security and confidentiality of examination papers and all are detailed in the policies. Unless you have specific details of those that are not complying to that, please, bring it to our attention.

Investment Projects Beneficial for MSMEs
(Question No. 225/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on how Government ensures that local Fijian workers and businesses, especially MSMEs, benefit from the 212 investment projects valued at around FJ\$6.2 billion?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government welcomes the pride and remarkable level of investment confidence being shown in our economy, as reflected in the 212 investment projects valued at an impressive \$6.2 billion.

It is important for me to highlight the composition of these 212 registered investment projects in terms of their stages of implementation or development. These projects are at varying phases of progress, some still conceptual, others in pre-development, and a significant number already under construction.

For the information of this House, 86 projects valued at approximately \$1.67 billion are currently under construction and 73 projects valued at \$2.3 billion are in the pre-development phase, awaiting some remaining approval and about to start groundbreaking. The rest of the 53 projects, with an estimated worth of \$2.2 billion, remain in the conceptual stage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these projects spread right across Fiji and covers 14 key sectors of our economy, from tourism and manufacturing to ICT, energy, agriculture, transportation, education and health. The details are in the list, so if an honorable Member wants a copy, it can be made available.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the heart of the Government's development philosophy is inclusive growth, that is, Fijian workers and Fijian businesses truly benefit from investments and growth, especially for MSMEs, which are the backbone of our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to achieve this, Government has adopted several practical and effectful strategies, as reflected in the 2025-2026 National Budget, to ensure that these projects bring real and lasting benefit to our people and the communities. Those investment projects will lead to empowering workers through education and skills.

First, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government remains steadfast in its commitment to education, skills development and workforce empowerment. We know the future belongs to those who are skilled and

prepared. That is why we are investing strongly in TVET, ensuring our young Fijians are ready to take up the jobs created by those investment projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the 2025-2026 Budget, we are increasing TVET scholarships from 2,780 to 4,500, including expanded opportunities for students with specialised skills so that more Fijians can gain the technical expertise demanded by sectors such as construction, tourism, ICT, renewable energy and manufacturing. We are acknowledging the gap that was there.

In addition, the macro qualification grant has expanded to 3,000 awards. It targets early school dropouts, unemployed youth and adults, providing short-term competency-based training in areas such as construction, hospitality, automotive, traditional handicraft, performing arts, community tailoring and women's small business operations. This ensures that MSMEs and local entrepreneurs can actively participate in supply chains, provide services and grow alongside major projects.

For specialised skills not available locally, the Government is expanding overseas TVET scholarships in priority fields such as water, insurance, manufacturing, hydrology, aviation, nautical sciences, equipping Fijians with advanced capabilities to support high-value investment projects.

By investing in these high-value programmes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government ensures that our Fijian workers are skilled, employable and ready to seize opportunities, while MSMEs are strengthened to supply goods, services and expertise, turning the \$6.2 billion investment pipeline, into real jobs, business growth and community prosperity.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are making it easier to do business in Fiji, particularly for our MSMEs. Through the 2025-2026 Budget, the Government has strengthened support for local businesses, ensuring that they can actively participate in our growing economy, and the \$6.2 billion investment projects.

Key initiatives, including the Trade Enhancement Programme (TEP), which provides grants for micro and small businesses to upgrade equipment, diversify products and supply goods and services for major projects.

The other example is the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES), which empowers recent graduates with grants, training and support to start ventures that engage in high-value chains linked to those investments.

The Intergrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP), which supports majority of Fijian-owned enterprises, cooperatives and community groups to access funding for value-adding equipment, storage, and warehouses for ecotourism facilities and diversification, ensuring local businesses can move from subsistence operation to being competitive suppliers of large investment projects.

To ensure indigenous Fijians benefit, the iTaukei Resource Owners Support and Development Fund provides interest subsidy on loans to help resource owners borrow and expand their business, enabling local enterprises and communities to participate in project supply chains.

The Northern Development Programme (NDP) builds capacity for MSMEs in the Northern Division to access opportunities in tourism, agribusiness and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MSME Strategy and national digital strategy strengthens business capacity, improve market access and equips local firms with digital tools to engage effectively

capacity, improve market access and equips local firms with digital tools to engage effectively with large projects.

Additionally, climate resilient partnership with ADB and UNDP provides MSMEs access to insurance risk mitigation and technical support, enabling them to operate confidently alongside major investments. Through this highly impactful initiative, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijian entrepreneurs and MSMEs have a real seat at the table, whether through construction contracts, catering, transport or supply chain associated with these 212 high-value projects.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has introduced targeted initiatives and concessions to ensure that Fijian workers and MSMEs directly benefit from our growing economy and the \$6.2 billion investment projects. Key measures include the employment taxation scheme, which has been extended until 31st October 2026.

Government has also introduced the 150 percent tax deduction for donations to accredited start-up programmes, including business incubators and entrepreneurs, giving local MSMEs access to mentorship, innovation support and capital for growth.

On other initiatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not forgetting our farmers and rural entrepreneurs. The 2025-2026 Budget continues to target agriculture and rural enterprise support, including fertilizer and equipment subsidies and cooperative grants. This initiative strengthens local supply capacity, allowing Fijian producers to better serve hotels, restaurants and export markets, directly linking rural MSMEs for the benefit of large-scale investment projects.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government, through Investment Fiji, continues to streamline investment facilitation, cutting through bureaucratic delays and making it easier for businesses to access the information and approvals they need.

A key part of this effort is the businessNOW FIJI platform, which provides a central digital portal for business registration, licence application and access to government services. By making it easier to start and operate a business, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the platform empowers Fijian workers and MSMEs to prepare for opportunities created by private sector investments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this investment will continue to generate ripple effects, creating employment, boosting demand for local goods and services and reinforcing overall business confidence. The combined impact of all initiatives from skills training and MSME support to tax incentives, infrastructure investment and transparent facilitation ensures that Fijians are not bystanders but active participants in national development.

That is how we build a resilient, inclusive and prosperous Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where investment grows communities where success is shared and wherever Fijian has the chance to thrive.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for a very comprehensive answer. My supplementary question is, what is being done to help iTaukei and women-led small businesses to benefit from this investment projects?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, empowering *iTaukei* and women-led enterprises remains a cornerstone of this Government's inclusive economic agenda. Through the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development in partnership with Government agencies, financial institutions and women-led cooperatives, we are advancing a coordinated strategy to expand access to finance, skills and markets. Guided by the cooperative and *solesolevaki* approach, we are revitalising communal business model, enabling village enterprises to pool resources, strengthen

governance and collectively meet the investment supply and demand.

At the same time, tailored financial products, literacy training and mentoring programmes and equipping women and entrepreneurs, particularly in rural and maritime areas, to formalise and scale their business. The National MSME database supports targeted, evidence-based policy development, while initiatives such as Start Your Own Business, bookkeeping and governance training enhance essential management and leadership skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by promoting collaboration, capacity building and inclusive growth, we ensure that every investment in Fiji also invests in our people, our communities and our shared prosperity.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his detailed response to the questions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand that this investment is driven by the private sector. My question is, out of the 212 projects that you have mentioned, how many of those projects or roughly what percentage is driven by local investors and by foreign investors?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the list here, but I was not be able to calculate how much is foreign and how much is local. However, looking at it in dollar terms, a bulk of that is overseas investors.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think even your Ministry of Commerce or Investment Fiji would be interested in this data or information, because that will show the interest expressed by foreign investors. That is why we wanted to know that because we all know the interest from foreign investors.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- We will provide and give you a copy if you want, honourable Member.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we welcome these investments. My question is of course, more private sector investment will mean higher GDP growth, more job creation, and even better human development indicators. My question is, how will this impact our GDP growth rate, if forecasted already, and the Human Development Index, particularly on per capita income? If all these 212 investments and \$612 billion land on our shores, how does it impact our GDP growth?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Thank you Honourable Member for that question. Surely, if all those projects come into place in a short time, it will surely affect economic growth in a year. However, from this pipeline, it will take a few years. Some will be completed this year, some next year, and the following year, so it will surely affect economic growth, as well as the per capita income.

HON. J. USAMATE.- How much? How long is the pipeline?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- \$6 billion.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the last three years, we have been hearing about pipelines, millions invested and ease of doing business. When we speak about doing ease of business for MSMEs, the question is related to one of the fiscal policies under Government that if we talk about ease of doing business, MSMEs have complained about the installation of Vat Monitoring System (VMS) at a \$50,000 threshold. Now, with you as the new Minister for Finance, if you really

want them to be able to save their money and invest in their productivity, are you looking to take this up back to \$100,000 threshold?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a new question altogether.

Savusavu Port Foreshore Lease Dispute
(Question No. 226/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Savusavu Port foreshore lease dispute which is creating operating challenges for tourism operators?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are five registered leases along the area that is identified in the question by the honourable Nand. Between the Savusavu Port foreshore area to Yaroi Bay, we have a record of five leases that exists there. I am not quite sure which lease he is attending to in this question that is in dispute. If he can clarify that for me, I will be able to assist the House with an answer. If you have a specific question in relation to any of those leases, I will be happy to assist.

MR. SPEAKER.- Maybe you will have the opportunity to ask another time, because that would tantamount to the second question. We will move on, thank you.

National Policy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
(Question No. 227/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on the key performance indicators for the Fiji National Policy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and strategies to address the shortcomings in improving their lives?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Qereqeretabua for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National Policy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has 13 priority areas. I will highlight the KPIs and Government investments.

(1) Coordination and Mainstreaming

- Ensure the Policy is fully implemented, monitored and resourced.
- coordinate disability services at national, divisional and district levels. There are district and divisional committees already working towards this.
- Mainstream disability across all Government programmes and plans.

(2) Advocacy and Awareness

- Breaking negative stereotypes and promoting a positive image of persons with disabilities.
- Raising awareness of their needs and rights.
- Encouraging acceptance and understanding of persons with disabilities and all their diversity.

- (3) Data and Research
 - Collecting accurate data to guide policies and programmes.
 - Measuring progress and identify areas needing more attention.
- (4) Health and Wellbeing

Ensuring persons with disabilities have access to affordable, quality and accessible health services throughout their lives.
- (5) Education and Training
 - Providing inclusive education at all levels, including early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education;
 - Training teachers to meet the needs of children with disabilities.
- (6) Employment and Economic Security
 - increasing employment opportunities in public and private sectors.
 - removing barriers to employment and supporting entrepreneurship.
 - providing reasonable accommodation to ensure equal participation.
- (7) Rights of Women, Children, Youth and Older Persons with Disabilities
 - Women and girls with disabilities enjoy full rights and freedoms.
 - Violence against women and children with disabilities is addressed.
 - Youth and older persons with disabilities are empowered to participate fully in society.
- (8) Accessibility

Improving access to facilities, services, and transport for all persons with disabilities.
- (9) Access to Justice

Ensuring equal access to justice for persons with disabilities, including courts and law enforcement.
- (10) Social Protection and Housing
 - Using social protection measures to promote equity.
 - Providing appropriate and affordable housing for persons with disability.
- (11) Assistive Devices and Technology
 - Improving supply, distribution, and maintenance of assistive devices.
 - Ensuring technology is accessible, affordable, and appropriate to support independence.
- (12) Sports and Recreation
 - Increasing participation in sports at all levels.
 - Improving accessibility to sport facilities and programmes.
- (13) Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change
 - Including persons with disabilities in all disaster planning and response.
 - Ensuring post-disaster assessments and climate change adaptation strategies consider their needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government's investment in persons with disabilities has increased significantly over the past five years, from \$21.8 million in the 2020-2021 Budget, to \$40.7 million in the 2024-2025 Budget - an increase of 86.8 percent. Most of this funding has been facilitated through our Ministry. Other partnering agencies include the Ministry of Finance, Ministry

of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Education. About \$7.6 million of this goes to 13,000 persons with permanent disability.

A Monitoring, Evaluation, Review and Learning (MERL) Framework is being developed and will be ready by mid-next year. This is being done in partnership with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities, OPDs and DFAT. This tool will monitor progress, including the KPIs, highlight successes, review strategies for areas facing challenges, and share good practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Policy and the investments made by Government shows our determination to ensure persons with disabilities live with dignity, independence, and equal opportunity.

I would like to provide further details to honourable Koya's question yesterday on the use of disability data for policy making and service delivery. There are already a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) or agreement with Fijian Elections Office to ensure inclusivity in the election process.

There is a MoA with TELS, MoA with the University of the South Pacific to ensure that the places are not only inclusive, but USP students could also come and be placed at the Council. There is draft MOA with Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to help conduct health surveys in villages for persons living with disability.

The data already is being used for revising of National Building Code. The National Council of Persons with Disabilities, as well as the OPDs, were consulted during the review of the National Building Code and written submissions have been provided to solidify the need to have accessible homes and inclusion in all building developments.

There is an MoA with Ministry of Housing for retrofits. The National Council of Persons with Disabilities, in 2025, entered into a partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Fiji's Spinal Injury Association for the retrofit assistance to the existing houses. To-date, 30 families have been assisted, and others are being checked for eligibility requirements.

Research conducted in the transport sector by NCPD and OPDs in 2023 found that there were low levels of accessibility overall, with only 23 percent of transport facilities accessible. Roads and footpaths should be disability-friendly so that people who use mobility devices, including wheelchairs and those with visual impairments, can move on without danger.

The Ministry would like to acknowledge Fiji Roads Authority for taking this into account. They are working on accessibility works in Savusavu that will also include the jetty.

The most visible changes to accessibility are in our major airports, and for that, we would like to thank the line Ministries and their statutory bodies. However, we would like to ask if developments for accessibility can also be made in smaller airports and airstrips. There is a lot of work to be done on making our seaports accessible.

To strengthen mainstreaming, as mentioned earlier, and coordination across Government Ministries, the Ministry of Civil Service has drafted a Disability Inclusion Policy to guide inclusive initiatives.

Data available through FEMIS supports equitable financial allocation for inclusive education. The data hub is also essential to capture information on non-school aged children with disabilities, to ensure access to early learning opportunities.

There remains a need to assess community awareness and understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities to strengthen rights-based advocacy, and that is being undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these updates reflect the ongoing efforts of the Ministry and the Council, and the advocacy of the organisations of persons with disabilities to promote inclusion and advance the rights of all persons with disabilities in Fiji in different sectors.

Westin Project – FNPF
(Question No. 228/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development inform Parliament on the reason why the Westin Project owned by FNPF and developed by Fletcher Construction came to a halt?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to advise that the Westin Redevelopment Project represents a major transformation of the former Regent Hotel, the first hotel in Denarau, originally built in 1975 and branded as the Westin in the late 1990s.

The property is fully owned by the Fiji National Provident Fund, through its subsidiary - Dubbo Pte Limited, and is being reconstructed and renovated by Fletcher Construction. Fletcher Construction Fiji which is a joint venture, is owned 50 percent by Fletcher Construction New Zealand, 25 percent by Fiji National Provident Fund and 25 percent by Fijian Holdings Limited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the works on the project temporarily came to a halt due to contractual matters, and a disagreement between the parties, and those parties are separate legal business entities. These matters resulted in differing views and delays in the fulfillment of certain project obligations. Despite ongoing efforts to resolve the issues and maintain progress on the site, this led to a short-term demobilization of works.

The Dubbo project entity, a subsidiary of FNPF, continues to operate in accordance with proper governance processes and is acting at all times in the best interest of the Fund and its members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, service to Parliament that both parties have been in continuous dialogue to finalise the matter. Discussions are progressing well, and I have been advised that the contractual issue is expected to be fully resolved by this week after which, normal construction activities will resume.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, construction progress across the guest room blocks has advanced to the final stages with practical completion now targeted for March 2026. Achieving this milestone will be a major step towards the stage opening and will mark significant progress in re-establishing the Westin as a premier destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support the property's business objective and brand launch, a stage opening strategy has been proposed to the operator. This approach will allow selected hotel areas to become operational ahead of full project completion, enabling early revenue generation while many works continue in non-critical zones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the complexity and challenges inherent in a large-scale redevelopment such as this, balancing the preservation of the hotel's historical character, while introducing modern design and amenities, the Fiji National Provident Fund remains fully committed

to completing the Westin project and delivering a world-class hospitality asset that will strengthen our tourism sector and create long-term values for our members and for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the negotiation and consultation between the parties, I cannot divulge any more information other than the one I have provided due to the sensitivity of the issue, and I do not want to prejudge the discussion results or the resolutions.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, after what you have just explained, have we not put ourselves in a difficult position because the property is owned by FNPF? The company doing the construction also is partially owned by FNPF. So, is it ethically not quite correct and we put ourselves in a very difficult position because effectively tomorrow, if it has to go to court, FNPF will be suing its own construction company? Have we not put ourselves in a difficult position?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is like a new question. However, I wish to advise that whatever happens here is like FNPF is the father and has two sons working under their father. The sons are negotiating and the father is there, ensuring that there is a resolution in the end.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for this opportunity. This project has been really delayed and it is costing the FNPF members lots of dollars. My question to you is, how will the members be compensated with this delay?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a new question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, I agree with the honourable Minister there. I think it goes much more than what the original question was.

National Family Planning Policy 2025-2030
(Question No. 229/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the launch of the National Family Planning Policy 2025-2030?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and thank you, honorable Member, for the question.

The National Family Planning Policy of 2025 to 2030 was developed through extensive consultations and collaborations between the various stakeholders, interested stakeholders, the practitioners, experts, those that serve in the frontline, together with our partner representatives and experts from within the Ministry. It was launched on 21st July this year, and was attended by members of the Diplomatic Corps, development partners, UN agencies, government representatives, civil societies, and NGOs.

The document is not just a policy, it is a historic milestone for our nation, as it reflects a unified national vision to improve health rights and the futures of every individual and families across our beloved country.

The Policy itself outlines four key national commitments, to:

- (1) ensure family planning services are accessible and inclusive.
- (2) strengthen and revitalize the delivery of high-quality services that are available, acceptable, affordable and provided by skilled personnel at all health facilities.
- (3) improve health service delivery for vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities.
- (4) integrate family planning into Fiji's Emergency Preparedness Response and Recovery Framework by 2030.

I have mentioned the four key commitments and how we will operationalise it is through our extensive workforce and in terms of the facilities that are available throughout the four Divisions. So, we are very grateful that the Policy is there, and it is now just to action the Policy so that it has some impact on the ground with our people.

FISHERIES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 33/2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 6th November, 2025, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with a right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I rise to move the Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2025 in this House.

On 25th April, 2023, Cabinet had approved the review of the fisheries legislation, through Cabinet Decision No. 171 of 2023. The ultimate goal of the review was to develop a fit-to-purpose legislation, to support growth in the fisheries sector, ensure food security and livelihoods, and encourage resource sustainability that benefits current and future generations.

The Ministry of Fisheries is mandated to sustain, manage and protect Fiji's fisheries resources. This responsibility is executed through various policies and, particularly, the following legislative framework that is directly administered by the Ministry, and these are the:

- (1) Fisheries Act 1941;
- (2) Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012;
- (3) Offshore Fisheries Management Regulation 2014; and
- (4) Aquaculture Act 2024.

This motion is for the amendment to the Fisheries Act 1941, to ensure ease of enforcement and application. The Act in its entirety will be reviewed consequently, but this

amendment is urgent for the sustainable management of inshore fisheries resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's marine and freshwater resources are facing increased pressures from exploitation, unsustainable harvesting practices, pollution, the effects of climate change, habitat degradation, and other external forces. Additionally, there has been a noticeable lack in the effectiveness of the Fisheries Act of 1941, in its current state, in terms of its management, compliance and enforcement aspects in relation to the present and emerging demands of the coastal or inshore fisheries sector in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Ministry continues to uplift the livelihoods of coastal communities and the benefits that they and the rest of Fiji enjoy from the utilization of marine resources, it must ensure that these practices are being pursued in a sustainable manner. As such, the proposed Bill is aimed at bridging the lack of management and compliance controls in the Fisheries Act 1941.

Under the current Fisheries Act 1941, enforcement is carried out by authorised officers appointed by the Minister, including police officers, licensing officers and fish wardens, who may inspect licences, board vessels and detain offenders and equipment without a warrant. Offences such as obstruction of fishing violations can lead to fines, imprisonment or cancellation of licences with vessels and catch subject to forfeiture upon conviction.

The enforcement in the 1941 Act is primarily at present through prosecution for offences which can be cumbersome, time consuming and a costly affair for all parties involved. This proposed Bill modernises the enforcement and compliance framework by introducing the issuance of inshore fisheries fixed penalty notices as a first tier of deterrence against non-compliance, apart from prosecution of offences in court.

This proposed Bill strengthens deterrence and efficiency through higher penalties separating the individual and the body corporate. It addresses the concept of continued offence or repeated offences by imposing fines. This Bill will be an adherence to an alignment with Fiji's current criminal procedure and sentencing laws.

The proposed Bill introduces a new section on the appointment of authorised officers and further strengthens the power of authorised officers by providing the power to search on land premises, fishing vessels or other craft engaged in the taking of fish. In doing so, the Bill broadens the scope of where a search can take place.

The proposed amendment also enhances the provision for the cancellation or suspension of licences by setting out the specific grounds on which a licence can be cancelled or suspended. Currently, the Fisheries Act 1941 only provides for cancellation of a licence upon conviction of an offence under the Act.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the appeals provision is introduced where a person, aggrieved by the decision, not to issue or renew a licence, or a decision to suspend or cancel a licence, may appeal to the Minister within a set timeframe. The Act of 1941 currently does not have an explicit appeal provision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, present this amendment Bill in the efforts by the Ministry towards the Sustainable Management of Marine Resources Utilization through a more efficient deterrence mechanism aligned to the oversight of Fiji's current criminal procedures and sentencing laws.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right to reply from the mover.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a brief intervention, I think this is a Bill that has quite a substantial amount of amendments, et cetera, that need to go into the Fisheries Act. Again, Sir, the use of Order 51 to fast-track it is being objected to by the Opposition because it will require some thought. There are punishments and with just a cursory glance on it, there are punishments that are increasing, there are new definitions with respect to vessels, et cetera, and there are a certain amount of things in there that will need to be addressed through a committee looking at it very quickly.

It is something that can be done by a committee very quickly. It was not a substantial Bill *per se*, but I really would like to know the reason behind it coming through on Order 51 so expeditiously it needs to be done. What is the urgency? That is the question.

From our perspective, it is not about what the content of the Bill is, it is about the process in which it is actually going to go to debate, the Order 51 process.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this is all rather sudden, so to speak, looking at what it is trying to do is not very complex. One of the things that we have found, some of the Bills that have come to Committee seem rather small, but when it is looked at in detail, some that we are currently looking at in the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, like the Burial and Cremations (Amendment) Bill 2025 and the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025, they look pretty simple. However, when the Committee went into it, they came up with all sorts of issues. So, I think to give it today and then to debate it tomorrow, I mean, 24 hours is not enough.

This should have been given to us. If you wanted to do it this quickly, it should have been given on Monday. Just give us some time to go through it. However, the ideal way to do this is to put it to a committee, so that the people's representatives, you and I, can look at it. You are the ministers, and you bring up something that has gone through the executive. There must be an opportunity for the people's representatives to also consult members of the public and the stakeholders. It is a shortcut.

We have the right to be able to look into this, and I am saying this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights have small Bills and when we dig into it, there are things that need to be corrected there. To do this very quickly, there are going to be possibility of things slipping through because you are fast-tracking. That is all I want to say.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to make a very short contribution. My view is that the level and the jurisdiction in which this new Bill will affect the resource owners who are outside the ambit of where the fisheries officers can actually investigate and carry out the requirements of the Bill. For instance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it means very well to change an act that was established in 1951, to modernise it and bring it to the present. I am just concerned that the level of policing now, the level of the jurisdiction and the actions carried out by the Fisheries Officers to actually put this into context.

If you look at the maritime islands, the closest two islands that have fisheries to the Southern Lau is basically Vanuabalavu and Lakeba, then you have one at Cicia. If you look at the islands in Lomaiviti, it will be Ovalau and Gau. There is none in Koro. How will the rural fishermen be able to be guided by this? At the moment, I am not sure about the roles of Fisheries Officers to be able to inspect and operationalise the existing legislation. I know there are huge gaps. If we are trying to stop the fishermen that come out from Viti Levu to fish within the maritime islands, that is fine. What about the fishermen who actually fish within the islands? They are the resource owners. They must have licence to be able to fish within their own fisheries areas. That is the problem.

You cannot say that fishermen that come out from the main centres will be bound by this regulation. This will also regulate the local fishermen who are the resource owners themselves. If you want to do it, just make sure that it is consistent because you cannot say, “Oh, no, I am a resource owner. I will not be bound by these regulations.” But a fisherman from Suva, Lautoka, or Labasa that come out and fish within my traditional boundaries will be confiscated. I think a lot of issues needs to be thought about. I mean, yes, by all means, update the regulations, update the Act to fit in what we need today but basically, we need to be fair and make sure that that this applies across the board.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to support the motion by the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry for this Bill to have its passage under Standing Order 51. I know that honourable Usumate has harped on about the opportunity for representatives of the people to be consulted and heard, and as Members of Parliament, that can happen tomorrow, as has been moved by the honourable Minister.

There is not quite a lot that needs to be changed. If we look at the Explanatory Notes, Paragraphs 1 to 3 which are the major paragraphs, if you count all of those, they have 14 small paragraphs. However, they only consist of eight amendments, and they come from 2.2 to 2.9. So, eight sections of the existing law has been asked for by the honourable Minister to be changed. They are very minor amendments. They do not really go to the heart or the depth of the intent of the Fisheries Act.

The point that has been raised by the honourable Minister is that it has come to the right time now for these amendments to be introduced because they fix operational hiccups that the Ministry continues to have. There is an explanation of the urgency in which this Bill needs to take its passage through Parliament.

If you take the eight amendments that have been sought, 2.2 to 2.9, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and his group can separate the paragraphs one by one all amongst themselves, but they still have three members to spare. You cannot say, “Oh, it cannot be dealt with in 24 hours”, but it can. They are small amendments, and I am sure with the collective brainpower of the honourable Leader of the Opposition and his group, and as we know from history that they are masters of Standing Order 51, they would not even expect the opposition in their days to traverse over larger amounts of amendments.

I think with the urgency, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that has been alluded to by the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, and the fact that operational hiccups continue to be experienced, it is an opportune time for this. This is one of those Bills where Standing Order 51 would be much justified. I stand in support of the motion.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to differ from my colleagues on this side in terms of opposing the Bill coming under Standing Order 51. I have my own reasons for that, and my reasons are we should practice what we preach.

Yes, we have brought in bills under Standing Order 51, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no doubt about that. The Opposition were given a day or so to debate on the Bill, but who were those people who said that we will not bring a single Bill under Order 51 when we come into Government, to the citizens of this country?

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It was not any of us. I can definitely see the faces on the other side who were advocating on this. I do not want to name them. They know very well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the reason I would support the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry for saying something else to the general public during elections, and doing exactly the opposite when they are in the Government on the same agenda that they were advocating during the elections, that they will not bring any bill under Standing Order 51 and they will listen to the general public. They will take all the Bills to the general public for consultation.

It is your Government, your voice. We will hear your voice before we actually present any particular Bill. So, thank you very much for bringing it under Standing Order 51.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 51 is in the Standing Orders for a specific reason. That is all. You cannot stand up and say why use it because it is here. When was the last time you used it?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Hear, hear!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Answer me! You cannot. It is a policy, a policy to address the lacuna in terms of enforcement.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Tell them!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- People go to Nairai and Gau to fish and come back. The fish wardens cannot prosecute them for the simple reason because the law is enough. You have not done that. That is what we intend to do. There will be an overhaul, but this is for these people, the *turaga-ni-koro*, this is what they need.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes we are!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It is really difficult to talk to the other side. It is like they are sleeping.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may just outline four reasons why it should be under Standing Order 51. The current Fisheries Act is outdated. It is inadequate for today's enforcement compliance needs, which is what we are doing right now. The Ministry urgently requests a new fixed penalty system to address rising non-compliance in coastline inshore fisheries.

What have you done for the *iTaukei* who own fishing rights? You actually stopped them from collecting money that is rightfully owed to them. Guess what? This Government is going to give it back to them.

The delay in passage would undermine ongoing reform timeliness and obligations to regional fisheries management frameworks. We have heard from the honourable Minister for Fisheries, who had attended these conferences, that we have an obligation not only to the *iTaukei* community but also to our very own people and to our voters. The Bill only makes targeted amendments. That is what they cannot understand, to strengthen enforcement and administration.

(Chorus of interjections).

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It is not a major policy shift, making it suitable for parliamentary procedures under Standing Order 51 and I support the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I would like to say to the Attorney General that his arguments were nothing to do with what this side of the House is trying to talk about. We are only talking about what you had said earlier on, “We will not use Standing Order 51”.

That was the argument because you must practice what you preach. You do not show us what are the things stated under Standing Order 51. We all know that. We have been in Parliament for quite some time. You are new to your seat, so you do not have to tell us what is in the Standing Order. However, the argument presented by honourable Koroilavesau is a sound argument and we hope that this Bill will not affect the resource owners. That is the only argument that I want to put across. Perhaps, I urge the honourable Minister to reconsider, if it has got any implications on the resource owners.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members who have contributed to the motion before the House. Thank you for your constructive comments.

Again, I wish to highlight that due to the emerging demands from the coastal and inshore fisheries sector, the Ministry is bringing forward this Amendment Bill so that we would be able to bridge the lack of management and compliance controls that is currently in the Fisheries Act.

Honourable Koya and honourable Usamate, the Inshore Fisheries Management Bill is currently with the Office of the Solicitor-General and when it will be tabled next year, it will definitely come to the Committee before it is brought back to be passed.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Vote Cast:

Ayes	-	39
Noes	-	12
Not voted	-	4

Motion agreed to.

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move that the:

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense review the following:

- (1) Protocol Relating to an Amendment to Article 50(a) of the Convention on International Civil Aviation; and
- (2) Protocol Relating to an Amendment to Article 56 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Acting Attorney-General has moved the motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I can confirm that the honourable Acting Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and Written Analysis, as required under Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), that Treaty and Analysis stands referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table a Report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting and Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.30 p.m.