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Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, being accorded a welcome prior to the handover ceremony of the 1,110-hectare ancestral land on Munia Island in Vanuabalavu, Lau. Photo: SUPPLIED

Yavusa Munia celebrates historic return of ancestral land

THE beating of traditional drums echoed across Avea Island in Vanuabalavu, Lau, as members of Yavusa Munia celebrated the return of the original title to their 1,110-hectare ancestral land. The handover in mid-July marked the successful completion of a 36-year journey under the Government's Freehold Land Buyback Scheme, restoring ownership of the land to the Yavusa after it had been out of their possession for about a century. Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka officiated at the handover ceremony and encouraged the landowners to embrace the responsibility that comes with reclaiming their ancestral land. PM Rabuka said the return of the island represented more than the restoration of ownership—it was the return of identity,

hope and responsibility. He congratulated the Yavusa Munia for fulfilling their obligations under the Government's FLBS and encouraged them to use the land to create sustainable opportunities for future generations while protecting its natural environment. Elders speaking on behalf of the village, 70-year-old Etuate Uni described the occasion as a historic day that fulfilled the dreams of their forefathers. "Our forefathers endured some of the hardest times when they were forced to leave Munia," he said. "What we are witnessing today is the reality of what our forefathers dreamed and worked so hard for. This is proof that their struggles were not in vain." Mr Uni thanked everyone who had contributed to the successful return of the

land, including the Government and the late former Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, whose vision for the FLBS gave the community renewed hope of reclaiming its ancestral land. Laisenia Naulumatua of Avea Island, Yavusa Munia, Mataqali Narocake, said the return of the original title was the culmination of decades of sacrifice, determination and faith. "It has not been easy. We have been working to get this land back for 36 years, and it had been taken away from us for about 100 years. Today, we are overjoyed and overwhelmed with emotion because we come from a remote island community. "We are grateful to the Government for allowing us to make payments over the years so that we could eventually reclaim our island.

"I would also like to acknowledge two people who played an important role in helping us begin this journey – the late Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and the late Filipe Bole, who were both part of the Government at the time. "Mr Qarase encouraged us to raise \$20,000 as a deposit so we could secure a bank loan to buy back our land. "When we organised the very first Munia Day fundraiser, we raised \$46,000. Today, with the Prime Minister returning our land title, we can only give thanks to God for making this day possible. "Life on the island has not been easy. The income we earn from harvesting coconuts was not enough to repay the loan, so everyone in the village came together to help with the repayments.

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Allocation to establish Counter-Narcotics Bureau amid surging drug cases

By SERAN DEVI

MORE than \$4 billion worth of illicit drugs has moved through Fiji's communities over the past three years, prompting the Government to launch a stronger crackdown aimed at breaking drug networks, protecting families and making communities safer.

The scale of the drug problem was highlighted by Minister for Policing and Communications, Ioane Naivalurua, during the 2026–2027 National Budget debate, where he said more than 2,400 drug-related cases were recorded last year alone.

Minister Naivalurua said the growing threat of illicit drugs was no longer only a policing issue but a national challenge affecting families, communities and Fiji's future.

"Drugs destroy lives, destabilise families, undermine communities and threaten the security of our nation," he said.

"The Government has allocated \$1.6

million towards expanding Fiji's counter-narcotics capability, including the establishment of the Counter Narcotics Bureau, recruitment of specialised officers and development of new legislation to target organised crime and drug trafficking."

Minister Naivalurua said the Government's approach would focus not only on enforcement but also prevention, rehabilitation and cooperation between agencies.

"A new national coordination approach for tackling transnational serious and organised crime and illicit drug networks will bring together agencies through the National Joint Enforcement Centre to share intelligence and coordinate operations."

He said joint operations between the Fiji Police Force and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces had already contributed to a reduction in drug-related cases, with figures showing a 30 per cent decline in the first quarter of the 2025–2026 financial year.

The Ministry has been allocated \$34.2

million, including funding to support digital transformation, improve connectivity and modernise public services.

Minister Naivalurua said hundreds of Government services would gradually move online, reducing the need for people to travel, wait in queues and complete manual paperwork.

"Less paperwork, less waiting and improved service delivery. The Government has identified 788 critical services for digital transformation, with 385 expected to be digitised by 2030."

For rural and maritime communities, improved access to technology remains a priority, with 50 satellite broadband community Wi-Fi sites already operational



Minister for Policing and Communications, Ioane Naivalurua, recently met with Christina Cavallo, Chargé d'affaires of the United States to Fiji, reaffirming the strong Fiji–United States partnership and discussing continued cooperation to strengthen Fiji's counter-narcotics capability and combat transnational crime **Photo: SUPPLIED**

and plans to connect more than 300 additional sites.

Minister Naivalurua said the Budget was designed to build a Fiji that was safer, more connected and better prepared for future challenges.

Fiji strengthens HIV response with new national headquarters



Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Senator Penny Wong and Fiji's Minister for Health and Medical Services, Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu during the official opening of Fiji's new National Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV Headquarters. **Photos: SUPPLIED**

By SERAN DEVI

FOR thousands of Fijians, the opening of a new national Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV headquarters augurs well for prevention, testing and treatment services by bringing it closer to the people who need them most.

The new facility was opened earlier this month by Minister for Health and Medical Services, Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, and Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Senator Penny Wong, as Australia announced an additional FJ\$23.5 million to support Fiji's HIV response.

The investment comes as Fiji faces a growing HIV outbreak, with adult prevalence among people aged 15 to 49 reaching 1.6 per cent and around two per cent among pregnant women.

More than 2,000 new HIV cases were recorded in 2025, compared with 1,583 in 2024 and 415 in 2023.

Around 80 per cent of new infections are among people aged between 15 and 34, with the highest concentration recorded among those aged 20 to 24.

Minister Lalabalavu said Fiji's response must focus on preventing new infections while ensuring that every person living with HIV is identified, treated and supported to remain healthy.

"We have powerful prevention tools available to us today. Our responsibility is to make sure that they reach the people who need them. Second, we will find, treat, and keep well every person living with HIV," he said.

He said Fiji would expand access to PrEP, condoms, PEP, HIV testing, harm reduction and sexual health services, particularly among communities most affected by the outbreak.

The Minister also stressed the importance of taking services directly to communities rather than expecting people to travel to hospitals for care.

He said stigma and judgement had no place in healthcare and that lasting progress would require people living with HIV, young people, civil society and faith leaders to be part of the response.

Senator Wong said Australia's support recognised that HIV was not only a health challenge but also a wider regional security issue.

"Our support recognises that this is a health challenge, but it is also a security challenge," she said.

She said the new headquarters represented Fiji's leadership and the strength of the partnership between Fiji, Australia and communities across the Pacific.

"Responding to HIV is not just a health challenge but a community challenge," Senator Wong said.

New tax breaks and state funds anchor Fijian Drua



Fijian Drua plays the Western Force in Perth in May. **Photo: DRUA**

By AZARIA FAREEN

THE Government continues to champion its majority 51 per cent state-owned asset, the Swire Shipping Fijian Drua, injecting vital support to navigate a critical financial crossroads.

Following the sudden conclusion of World Rugby funding, the state has consistently anchored its national team's commercial stability, ensuring that Fiji's professional rugby pathways remain open to safeguard local talents from being lost overseas.

In the 2026–2027 National Budget, the cash sponsorship threshold for the Fijian Drua has been lowered from \$250,000 to \$100,000, while the existing 200 per cent tax deduction available for sponsorship of the Fijian Drua will be extended to Bula FC.

The new chief executive officer for the Fijian Drua, Jeff Miller, said that this allocation will assist them with the operating capacity and ensure that they are able to remain competitive in a very tough competition.

"For a young club competing in an elite arena against historic franchises, this financial backstop transforms institutional pressure into human security," he said.

"The Drua team has evolved into an essential financial engine for ordinary citizens, generating over \$108 million in annual economic activity through sports tourism, hospitality, and local enterprise, so I'd say that this is an excellent investment by the government."

"By reinforcing the franchise, the government secures crucial livelihoods for local vendors and staff while maintaining a vibrant schedule of seven

to eight home games right here in Fiji," he added.

Beyond the elite squad, the Government is strategically mobilising private sector capital to fuel development pathways. To build a thriving grassroots foundation, medium-sized businesses can now qualify for a 200 per cent tax deduction when sponsoring the team, sparking a surge of interest from new corporate partners.

"We thank the Government for announcing this in the budget because it means that there are more businesses, small to medium, looking to engage with the Drua, and we have actually received a lot of interest in this. It also allows them the opportunity to be able to partner with a club like ours for the benefit of all," he said.

"This creative fiscal incentive guarantees that aspiring young men and women from rural villages retain a direct, world-class path to professional rugby on home soil," he added.

Reflecting on the immense responsibility of managing the Fijian Drua, Mr Miller emphasised that government backing goes far beyond corporate sustainability—it is about nurturing a national treasure.

"Our club is only five years old, and we're playing against many clubs that are over 100 years old. So, with the support of the government, that's helping a very young child start to mature, turn into a teenager and then hopefully will become an adult sooner rather than later," he shared.

By bridging corporate strategy with community dreams, the Government-backed rugby evolution is doing far more than winning matches—it is uniting an entire nation, preserving a cultural legacy, and constructing a self-sufficient future for local heroes.

PM visits six health workers after ordeal at sea

By SERAN DEVI

PRIME Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, thanked the six healthcare workers who survived 36 hours of exposure to the elements in the treacherous Lau waters for their services. The Head of Government, while visiting the medical professionals at the Twomey Hospital in Tamavua last month, acknowledged their contribution to serving the people in remote places during the medical outreach programmes. The six workers had been reported missing last week after the Ministry of Health and Medical Services vessel, MD Ono-i-Lau, encountered difficulties while travelling from Moce to Oneata. PM Rabuka spent time with each of the recovering officials, offering words of encouragement and thanking them for their service to communities in the maritime islands. He assured them that the Government and people of Fiji had been thinking of them and praying for their recovery. “Thank you very much for your dedicated and selfless service. Stay strong. You are in our thoughts and prayers, and we pray for

your full recovery,” he told the workers. The six-member team comprised a medical officer, dental officer, charge nurse, peer educator, health inspector and dental assistant, who had been carrying out a medical outreach mission in the Lau Group. They had departed Moce at about 7am on July 29 and were expected to reach Oneata after about two hours but the vessel’s engine reportedly failed before it began taking in water, leaving the team stranded at sea. The healthcare workers put on life jackets and used wooden floor planks from the vessel as flotation devices. The boat handler was later located by a search party from Lakeba and taken to Lakeba Hospital for treatment. Information provided by the boat handler indicated that the remaining team members had initially been safely secured without injuries. The delayed arrival of the vessel prompted the District Nurse in Oneata to alert Lakeba Sub-Divisional Hospital, leading to the mobilisation of search teams. A coordinated search and rescue operation was subsequently carried out by the Ministry of Health, Fiji Police Force, Fiji Navy Rescue Coordinating Centre, the



Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, visits the six medical professionals at the Twomey Hospital in Tamavua last month which was reported missing last week. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

Office of the Commissioner Eastern and other agencies. Search efforts were coordinated from Lakeba and the Eastern Health Division, while communities across Lakeba, Nayau, Vanuavatu and Moala were alerted to assist

with the search. With the six workers now receiving medical care, PM Rabuka reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to supporting them throughout their recovery.

Yavusa Munia celebrates historic return of ancestral land

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“Even after 30 years, we had only managed to repay about half of the loan. The Government then gave us an additional six years to complete the buyback. “Now that we have fully paid for the land and received back the original title, we feel a great sense of pride and relief. We remain deeply indebted to the late Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase because the buyback programme was his vision, and today we honour his contribution. “I also give thanks to God for what has happened today. There were times when we almost lost hope, but we held on to our faith and our determination. “This journey has taught us that protecting what is important is not only about knowledge or wisdom—it is also about honesty, maturity, perseverance and working together as one people.”

- Staff writer VILIAME TIKOTANI and Office of the Prime Minister

FACT FILE: LAND RETURN INITIATIVES UNDER THE COALITION GOVERNMENT

- Key Achievements
- 5 major land return initiatives completed.
 - Approximately 23,399 acres of ancestral land returned to customary landowners.
 - Land returned through the Freehold Land Buy-Back Programme, State land returns, and Native Grant land returns.

- Major Land Returns
- Nadala, Ba – 15,000 acres returned to Mataqali Nadala (Yavusa Nubu).
 - Vitogo, Lautoka – 3,177 acres returned to five mataqali of the Vanua of Vitogo.
 - Freehold Land Buy-Back Initiative – 2,465 acres returned to native landowners.
 - Avea Island, Lau – 1,110 hectares (approximately 2,743 acres) returned to Yavusa Munia after a 36-year buy-back journey.
 - Nausori – 14 acres, including the former Nausori Golf Course, returned to Mataqali Nailagobokola.

Government Commitment

The Coalition Government remains committed to recognising customary land ownership, resolving historical land issues through lawful processes, and supporting sustainable development for indigenous landowners.

FACT FILE: LAND RETURN INITIATIVES UNDER THE COALITION GOVERNMENT

The Coalition Government’s Commitment

The Coalition Government is committed to returning land to original customary landowners where lawful pathways



Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, with children during the handover ceremony of the land to the Yavusa Munia. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

- exist, recognising customary ownership, addressing historical land issues, and supporting long-term community development.
- Major Land Return Initiatives
1. Nadala, Ba (March 2026)
 - Land Returned: 15,000 acres (Native Grant No. 2)
 - Beneficiaries: Mataqali Nadala, Yavusa Nubu
 - Government ownership: More than 120 years
 2. Vitogo, Lautoka (January 2026)
 - Land Returned: 3,177 acres
 - Beneficiaries: Five mataqali of the Vanua of Vitogo
 - Government ownership: About 102 years
 3. Government Freehold Buy-Back Initiative (2025)
 - Land Returned: 2,465 acres
 - Beneficiaries: Native landowners through the Freehold Buy-Back Programme
 4. Avea Island, Vanua Balavu, Lau (2026)
 - Land Returned: 1,110 hectares (approximately 2,743 acres)
 - Beneficiaries: Yavusa Munia
 - Milestone: Completed after a 36-year community-led buy-back effort.
 5. Nausori (June 2026)
 - Land Returned: Approximately 14 acres (including the

- former Nausori Golf Course)
- Beneficiaries: Mataqali Nailagobokola, Yavusa Vunivivi
 - Government ownership: About 150 years
- At a Glance
- 5 major publicly announced land return initiatives
 - More than 23,000 acres of land returned (including the 1,110 hectares at Avea converted to approximately 2,743 acres)
 - Communities benefiting: Mataqali, Yavusa and indigenous landowners across Fiji
 - Key mechanisms:
 - o Freehold Land Buy-Back Programme
 - o Return of State-held land
 - o Return of Native Grant land
 - o Restoration of former Government-held customary land
- Government’s Objectives
- Recognise customary land ownership
 - Resolve longstanding historical land matters
 - Strengthen indigenous land rights
 - Promote reconciliation
 - Support sustainable development and improved livelihoods
 - Enable communities to benefit from their ancestral land

Govt services improve daily lives of rural women

By VILIAME TIKOTANI

AT 69 years of age, Adi Kaveri Salaivalu of Nabutautau Village in Navatusila has seen how access to Government services can make a difference for families living in rural communities.

Together with Litiana Marama, 59, and Sulueti Veidokai, 58, Adi Kaveri said they always make the effort to attend Government outreach programmes whenever services are brought closer to their area.

“Whenever Government services come to our communities, we try our best not to miss them because these services support our everyday lives,” Adi Kaveri said.

She explained that agricultural support has been especially important for families in Nabutautau, with villagers accessing farming assistance through the Ministry of Agriculture such as seedlings and agricultural supplies to improve their farms.

“Farming is important to us because our village is also visited by tourists, and the support we receive helps us strengthen our farms and improve our livelihoods,” Adi Kaveri said.

She said one of the biggest changes experienced by the community has been access to electricity, which has transformed daily life for many families.

“We are very fortunate that our village is now connected to electricity. It has brought a big change to our homes,” she said.

“As women, electricity has made our work much easier. Cooking, baking and other household activities can now be done faster, giving us more time to focus on other responsibilities.”

She said the continued effort to bring Government services closer to rural communities is making a positive difference for people living far from urban centres.

“We are thankful that services are now reaching those of us living in remote areas because it helps improve the lives of our families and our communities,” she added.



Adi Kaveri, Litiana Marama, Sulueti Veidokai of Nabutautau village, Navatusila Tikina in the province of Navosa.
Photo: VILIAME TIKOTANI

Safer waiting facility improves travel for maritime travellers



Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, Mosese Bulitavu, commissioning the new Qoma Waiting Shed at Nukuvutu Landing in Tailevu recently. Photo: SUPPLIED

FAMILIES travelling by sea for school, medical appointments, work and other essential services now have a safer and more comfortable place to wait following the commissioning of the new Qoma Waiting Shed at Nukuvutu Landing in Tailevu recently.

The new facility replaces an ageing structure and provides much-needed shelter for commuters travelling between Qoma, Ovalau, Naigani and Moturiki.

Built under the Rural Outer Island (ROI) Development Programme at a cost of more than \$50,000, the project also includes sanitation and bathroom facilities.

Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, Mosese Bulitavu said the project was the Government’s commitment in delivering practical infrastructure that improves the lives of people in rural and maritime communities.

“This waiting shed will be a place where our people can wait safely and with dignity while travelling for school, work, medical appointments or to visit loved ones. It reflects the Government’s commitment to ensuring our maritime communities have access to safe, reliable infrastructure that improves

everyday life for those in our maritime communities,” Minister Bulitavu said.

For many years, commuters have relied on Nukuvutu Landing as their main departure and arrival point, often waiting for boats in harsh sun or heavy rain.

The new waiting shed now provides a safer and more comfortable environment, particularly for school children, the elderly, women and families who depend on regular sea transport.

Qoma Village headman, Joeli Cagica welcomed the project, saying it would greatly improve the safety and comfort of families using the landing every day.

“I sincerely thank the Government for this much-needed project. Parents no longer have to worry about their children waiting in the rain or the hot sun before catching a boat to school. Our elderly, women and everyone travelling through this landing now have a safe place to wait. This new facility also includes sanitation and bathroom facilities. This is a simple project, but it will make a big difference in our daily lives,” he said.

(Source: Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management)

Families begin a new chapter with Nepani home ownership



Sisalo Qarikau and his wife, Vuseya Toko, in front of their newly acquired home through the Housing Authority Scheme. Photo: SERAN DEVI

FOR years, home ownership felt out of reach for Warsha Maharaj and Sisalo Qarikau.

Like many Fijian families, they navigated rising rental costs, lengthy application processes and uncertainty while hoping for a place they could one day call their own.

Last month, that hope became reality when they were among 31 families presented with the keys to their new homes at the Housing Authority’s Nepani Subdivision.

For Mrs Maharaj, the handover marked the end of an eight-year journey of renting.

“I’m really happy because for the past eight years we have been renting here and there,” she said.

“We always looked forward to buying a house, but there were always challenges with the documentation. When the housing opportunity came out online, we applied and we got it. Me and my husband are both so happy.”

The two-bedroom home will be shared by Mrs Maharaj, her husband and her father-in-law. She said it provided the stability they had long hoped for after years of paying between \$700 and \$900 a month in rent.

“Rather than paying rent, it’s better to pay for a house of our own,” she said.

She added that the weekly loan repayments were affordable and manageable, while the Housing Authority staff had supported the family throughout the application process.

“The Housing Authority staff and everyone has been really supportive in getting all the documents together after we were confirmed for the house.”

For fellow homeowner Sisalo Qarikau of Drekeniwai, Cakaudrove, the journey began after coming across a Housing Authority advertisement on social media.

“I think it was mostly through social media,” Mr Qarikau said.

“There was an advertisement that the Housing Authority put out on Facebook and we were fortunate enough to find the link and go through the application process. It took quite some time but in the end it was all worth it.”

Having previously lived with his parents, Mr Qarikau said receiving the keys to his family’s first home was an emotional moment.

“We feel grateful and very blessed. Today, first and foremost, I was feeling very emotional and I’d like to give all the honour and glory to God.”

He encouraged other families and young couples to take advantage of similar opportunities.

“The first step is just to have that mindset,” he said.

“We never thought that we would be rewarded at the end of this stage, so we’re grateful and humbled for the opportunity. Please go ahead and try whatever housing schemes are available from the Government and the Housing Authority.”

Speaking during the handover ceremony, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said the presentation of homes represented far more than the transfer of property, describing it as “a celebration of hope, opportunity and the fulfilment of aspirations”.

Sharing his own family’s experience of building a home through a Housing Authority loan, he said secure housing created opportunities for future generations and reflected the Government’s commitment to ensuring more Fijians had access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

For both families, the keys handed over at Nepani symbolised much more than a new address.

They represented years of patience, perseverance and sacrifice finally rewarded with the security of a home to call their own.

\$8.6M plan to outsmart severe weather

By AZARIA FAREEN

THE Coalition Government continues to rapidly fortify the nation's climate defences, aggressively funnelling millions into advanced early warning networks to shield everyday citizens from escalating tropical storms.

By systematically modernising regional tracking technology and securing massive international climate grants, the state has been actively safeguarding isolated coastal villages to ensure that no family was caught off guard by unpredictable severe weather.

To ensure precise tracking, the Government has steadily scaled up its financial backing, lifting the Fiji Meteorological Service budget from \$8 million in the 2025-2026 financial year to a robust \$8.6 million allocation in the 2026-2027 National Budget.

In commending the allocation, the Minister of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, Filipe Tuisawau,

highlights that for thousands of ordinary people living along vulnerable riverbanks and maritime coasts, this meteorological overhaul transforms terrifying weather alerts into actionable, lifesaving security.

"This boosted funding directly maintains critical radar infrastructure, keeping public safety warnings, marine alerts, and agricultural forecasts running seamlessly across the Pacific," Minister Tuisawau said.

"Rather than relying purely on internal funds, the ministry is aggressively unlocking global environmental capital to build structural resilience, and the state has successfully captured a \$7 million Global Environment Facility grant to rehabilitate 17 ageing floodgates across the flood-prone Rewa-Tailevu South region."

"Additionally, a specialised Coanda Screen is being installed at the Savura Catchment to purify community water quality, backed by \$1 million dedicated to preparatory works for a brand-new regional Meteorological Training Centre right here in Nadi," he added.

Reflecting on the human victory behind these rising numbers, the Minister reaffirmed that these investments focus directly on protecting human lives and community livelihoods.

"These initiatives have had a direct and positive impact on our people, improving access to electricity, enhancing quality of life, and supporting our national goals for sustainable development and climate action," Minister Tuisawau stated.

With cutting-edge satellite forecasting and nature-based riverbank conservation, Fiji's meteorological evolution is doing far more than tracking wind speeds—it is restoring peace of mind,



Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, Filipe Tuisawau, officiated at the groundbreaking of the Regional Training Centre (RTC) and the Regional Instrument Centre (RIC) at the Fiji Meteorological Service Headquarters in Nadi.

Photo: SUPPLIED

securing vital food crops, and guaranteeing a safer, climate-resilient future for families nationwide.

Minister Tuisawau commends WAF achievements



Water project- Dama District School Photo: SUPPLIED

By AZARIA FAREEN

ACCCESS to safe, reliable water does more than just quench thirst; it serves as the heartbeat of Fiji's communities, tourism, and national growth.

In the 2025-2026 financial year, the Government channelled a massive \$284.4 million budget into the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), and by June 2026, WAF had carefully utilised \$123 million for operations and \$136.06 million for critical capital investments, turning public funds into real, life-changing milestones for thousands of families.

These investments have brought tangible relief directly to everyday Fijians, as by May 2026, WAF successfully delivered 4,947 new water connections and 241 wastewater connections, opening fresh opportunities for households and local businesses alike.

Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, Filipe Tuisawau, highlighted that these achievements reflect a deep commitment to ensuring "reliable water and sanitation services drive economic growth, improve the living standards, and strengthen food security."

"Across the islands, small communities are celebrating major victories. In Levuka, the \$2.3 million Totogo Reservoir Replacement Project has successfully secured clean water for 2,800 residents,"

he said.

"The \$650,000 Naqali Village Water Mains Project brought dependable supply to 700 people, and the Mate Road Water Extension Project gave 300 Western Division residents direct access to safe drinking water."

"Larger, transformative developments like the Tamavua Packaged Water Treatment Plant are also moving forward, set to strengthen water production for 230,000 people in the Greater Suva area, while the Elevated Princess Road Water Supply Project will provide a reliable 24-hour water supply to approximately 14,000 residents in elevated communities, and the Davetalevu Infrastructure Upgrade will improve water security and reduce water-carting needs across Tailevu Province."

"True progress means leaving no community behind, especially in our rural and maritime zones. To protect families during harsh dry seasons, the Rainwater Harvesting Programme delivered 475 water tanks, instantly benefiting 2,185 Fijians and reducing their reliance on emergency water carting," he added.

Minister Tuisawau adds that 18 rural water projects were completed across the Central, Western, and Northern Divisions.

By nurturing the next generation, WAF also launched a vital apprenticeship programme with Fiji National University, welcoming 86 passionate apprentices into the workforce.

Building a better Fiji through national connectivity



The new suspension bridge in Bua Lomanikoro which was commissioned by Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka recently. Photo: SUPPLIED

By AZARIA FAREEN

THE Coalition Government was firmly committed to responsible financial management and improving the lives of all Fijians through targeted infrastructure investments.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services, and Transport, Filipe Tuisawau, who has championed the 2026-2027 National Budget as a critical turning point for the nation.

Out of an overall ministerial allocation of \$820.8 million, a substantial \$370 million has been dedicated specifically to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) to enhance national connectivity and economic growth.

Reflecting on recent milestones, Minister Tuisawau said that the nation has already seen remarkable efficiency in public asset management.

By June 2026, the FRA managed an overall infrastructure budget of \$329 million, achieving an impressive 89 percent utilisation rate through careful planning.

Furthermore, the Maintenance and Renewals Programme for Roads, Bridges, and Jetties successfully utilised 112 per cent of its \$279.3 million allocation.

Minister Tuisawau emphasised that these accomplishments demonstrate a "continued commitment to strengthening connectivity, building resilience, and improving service delivery."

"A major highlight of this comprehensive development strategy focuses on reinforcing Fiji's vital bridge networks," he said.

"The emergency replacement of Semo Bridge, a project valued at approximately \$4.5 million, continues to progress smoothly following previous structural failures. Concurrently, the Waidalice Bridge upgrade has advanced steadily with current expenditures reaching \$3.4 million against a \$10 million budget allocation."

"Additionally, a dedicated \$41.5 million allocation under the 40 Critical Bridge Resilience Project will fund four priority bridges at Lami, Medrukutu, Sabeto, and Veseisei, and while recognising that structural safety directly impacts everyday life, a significant \$118 million has been dedicated solely to maintaining existing assets," he added.

The network currently handles 6,375 kilometres of roads, 1,388 bridges, and 32 jetties. A targeted funding of \$8.5 million will focus purely on road safety initiatives, including line marking improvements and targeted safety measures across the national road network.

Meanwhile, \$21.6 million is set aside to refurbish and replace 13 priority bridges, treating the heavily populated Koronivia Bridge corridor as an urgent priority.

"The New Capital Community Programme utilised \$22 million at an 86 per cent rate to build bus shelters, footpaths, and school access roads," Minister Tuisawau highlighted.

"Future rural connectivity upgrades will span key areas like Rewa Vutia and the Nasau-Naivaka Road in Bua."

"Urban areas will also benefit from 24 new bus shelters in the Central Division and upgrades across 27 Western Division locations. To safeguard the future against environmental challenges, the Ministry has integrated climate resilience into every core plan with allocation of \$2 million for coastal protection along vulnerable roads, alongside \$3 million for seal extensions."

"The \$300 million Vanua Levu Roads Project, funded by the People's Republic of China, is currently under contract bidding," he added.

Minister Tuisawau notes that these initiatives lay a firm foundation to deliver safe, resilient infrastructure that enhances the quality of life for all.

Fiji Focus – Minister’s Corner



By Lynda Tabuya
Minister for Information, Environment
and Climate Change

Warm greetings to our readers, and welcome to the August edition of Fiji Focus, the Government newspaper that supports our vision of making Government information accessible to all.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this edition and to reaffirm the important role that Fiji Focus continues to play in connecting Government with the people of Fiji.

Access to reliable information is essential for every community. It helps us understand the services available to us, stay informed about Government initiatives, make better

decisions, and participate more actively in the development of our nation. Through Fiji Focus, and its vernacular publications Noda Viti and Fiji Darpan, we remain committed to ensuring that accurate, timely and relevant information reaches all Fijians, wherever they live and in the language they understand best.

In today’s rapidly evolving digital world, information moves faster than ever before. While technology has created many opportunities to connect and share knowledge, it has also made it easier for false and misleading information to spread. As citizens, we all have

a responsibility to be mindful of the information we consume and share, particularly during times of emergency or national importance.

This is why trusted and verified sources remain so important. The Ministry of Information continues to work closely with Government ministries, media partners and communication officers across the country to ensure that official information is accurate, consistent and accessible. We are also strengthening our communication capabilities so that we can better serve the public in an increasingly digital

environment.

As we continue our mission of making Government information accessible to all, I encourage every reader to make use of trusted Government platforms and publications such as Fiji Focus, Noda Viti, Fiji Darpan, Government Facebook and Website page to stay informed about the work being carried out across the country on your behalf.

Thank you for your continued support. I hope you enjoy this edition and find the stories and updates informative and valuable.

Vinaka vakalevu.

Delivering Government news to every corner of Fiji



Solomoni Savu from Lomaloma village on Vanuabalavu in Lau Group, reads the Fiji Focus which is made accessible through the Post Office on the island. Photo: KATARINA NAQARASE

By KATARINA NAQARASE

FOR many Fijians living in remote maritime communities, the monthly arrival of the Ministry of Information’s Fiji Focus newspaper is more than just the delivery of a publication—it is a vital connection to Government services, national developments and opportunities.

Although digital platforms have changed the way people access information, unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to mobile devices mean printed publications remain an important source of news for many communities.

Alongside Fiji Focus, the Ministry of Information also publishes the Noda Viti in iTaukei and Fiji Darpan in Hindi, helping ensure important Government information reaches every corner of the country.

Speaking from Lomaloma in Lau, Solomoni Savu said Fiji Focus has become an important source of information for the community.

“The Fiji Focus contains important government news and provides information on the assistance and services available through different ministries,” Mr Savu said.

Poor internet connectivity often makes it difficult for island communities to access information online.

“Sometimes the internet connection is a major problem for us. When we receive the Fiji Focus newspaper, it helps us stay informed about what is happening around Fiji. We can also read about important national issues, government developments, and even major international events such as conflicts and other global news.”

Mr Savu said the newspaper is especially valuable for residents who do not own mobile phones or have regular access to digital platforms.

“Some people in our island do not have mobile phones, so they depend on the Fiji Focus newspaper to stay updated with the latest news and information,” he said.

He also welcomed the newspaper’s multilingual approach and encouraged the continued availability of the Hindi edition.

“We enjoy having access to the Hindi edition, as some of the teachers, hospital staff, and other members of our community are more comfortable reading in Hindi. Having newspapers in different languages ensures everyone has equal access to important information,” Mr Savu said.

By delivering Government news directly to communities across Fiji, Fiji Focus continues to bridge the information gap, ensuring people—whether in urban centres or the most remote islands—remain informed about Government initiatives,

Post Fiji: Connecting communities, creating opportunities

Brief History of Post Fiji

POST Fiji’s story began in 1871, when the first Postal Act established the Postal Department in Fiji, laying the foundation for a service that has connected people and communities for more than 150 years.

Originating in Levuka, postal services played a vital role in linking Fiji with the rest of the world through mail, money orders and communications.

Following postal sector reforms, Post Fiji became a corporatised entity on 1 July 1996, operating as a Government-owned company under the Companies Act while continuing to fulfil its universal service obligation.

Today, Post Fiji operates 58 Post Offices and approximately 10 Postal Agencies across Fiji one of the country’s most extensive service networks allowing it to evolve from a traditional postal operator into a modern community service provider connecting urban, rural and maritime Fiji.

Decision to expand its services and how it evolved

Like postal administrations worldwide, Post Fiji faced a steep decline in traditional letter mail as digital communication took over with much of the remaining volume consisting of transactional and business correspondence, including utility bills.

However, this disruption also created an opening: parcel post grew by roughly 40 per cent, driven by the rise of online trading and e-commerce, and the trend only accelerated as COVID-19 border closures cut into international mail revenue.

Instead of treating its network as a mail-delivery system alone, Post Fiji began transforming each Post Office into a multi-service community hub expanding into courier and logistics, retail, financial and agency services, bill payments and e-commerce support, without needing extensive new infrastructure.

Impact of Expanded Services on Rural and Maritime Communities
For many people in Fiji’s rural and



Post Office staff in Totoya, Lau during the installation of solar systems. Photo: POST FIJI

maritime communities, the local Post Office is more than a place to send or receive mail it’s often the closest, most trusted point of access for essential services, sparing families a costly trip to town.

In partnership with the Bank of the South Pacific (BSP), Post Fiji now offers banking at 58 Post Offices. A farmer in a remote district can now purchase agricultural inputs, access banking services and send parcels from the same Post Office without travelling to a major town. The reintroduction of M-PAiSA services has made it easier for families to access Government assistance and pay cashlessly by QR code.

AgroPost has further strengthened rural support by improving access to seeds, organic fertilisers, and farming equipment, helping farmers raise productivity while cutting transport costs. Together, these initiatives improve financial inclusion, strengthen rural economies, and ensure Fijians enjoy essential services regardless of location.

Confirmed strategic direction

Post Fiji’s long-term strategy is to maximise the value of its existing nationwide network by transforming Post Offices into convenient community service hubs.

All 58 Post Offices are now connected to a centralised online network, enabling real-time processing of parcels, bill payments and money transfers the foundation for further e-commerce support and faster service.

Post Fiji has also introduced solar power at remote outlets, including Qarani in Gau and across the Lau Group, improving reliability.

As part of its regional role, Post Fiji hosts the Universal Postal Union’s Regional Office in Suva, supporting postal development across eight Pacific Island countries.

The strategy is to maximise the existing network’s value strengthening partnerships (such as the recent OrganicPlus Fiji liquid compost collaboration) and investing in technologies that improve convenience and efficiency.

Looking ahead — what communities want to see

Expanded banking, Government services, mobile money and bill payments available locally; AgroPost growing further with more products, seasonal advice, and closer ties to agricultural agencies; a wider range of affordable household and school goods; support for local enterprise, including selling handicrafts through the postal network; simple digital-skills guidance for parcel tracking, mobile wallets and scam avoidance; and practical disaster-preparedness information, including service continuity during cyclones and floods.

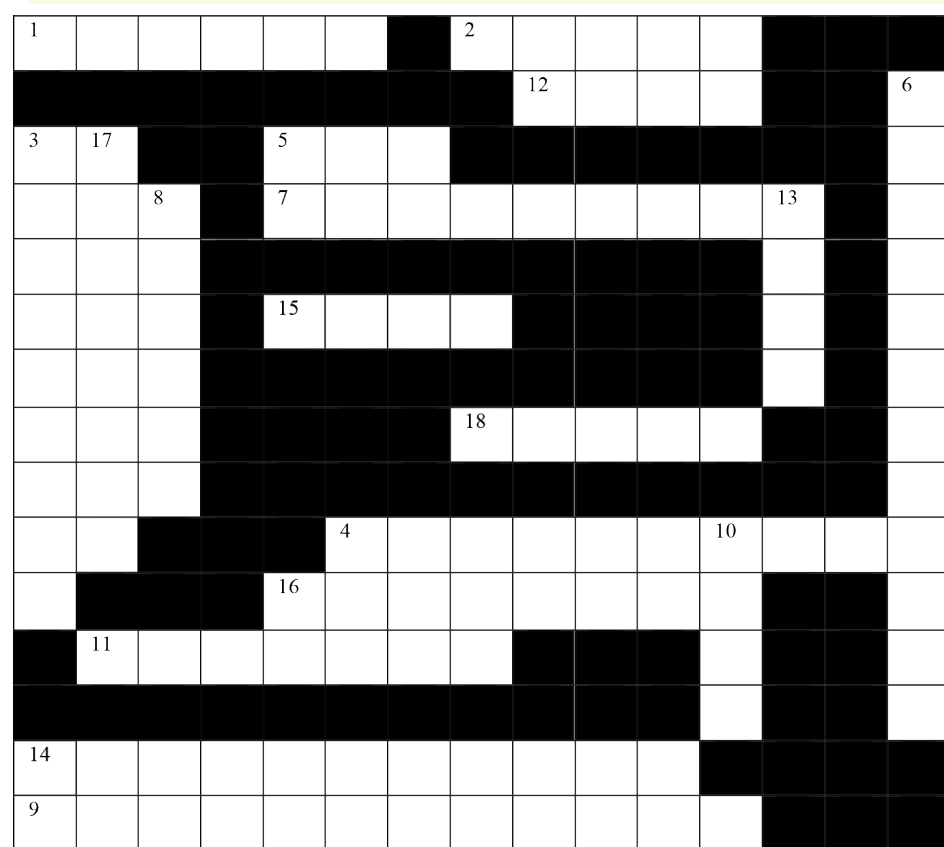
Also, the provision of internet services and EFL cash-power coupons in the rural areas.

(Source: Post Fiji)

Test your brain and challenge your friends!

Test your brain and challenge your friends!

- ## CROSSWORD



3. A system of government where people choose their leaders
6. The highest set of laws and principles that guide the country
8. Fiji's first capital
10. A traditional Fijian performance involving song and dance
13. A practice that combines physical postures and breathing
17. Fiji's "Salad Bowl"

Find and circle the 12 Fijian artifact words hidden in the puzzle below. Words may appear across, down, or diagonally, and can be written forwards or backwards.



**RELAX
CREATE
ENJOY!**

**LET YOUR
CREATIVITY
BLOOM!**

**GRAB YOUR
COLORS AND
HAVE FUN!**

T A N O A P K L R S U V W X T
Q H R M N C I B I D F G H J A
L M A G I M A G I P T Y U K B
N V Q T R E W L P O I U Y T U
P O Z M A S I K L R T Y U I A
H G F D S Q W E R T I R I N C
J K L M N B V C X B U R E O D
A S D F G H J K L Z X C V B E
Q W E R S A Q A P L M N O P F
B T Y U I O P A S D F G H J K
U R E W T Y U I O P A S D F G
L M N B V C W A U L Z X C V B
I H J K L M N E P Q R S T U V
O P Q R S T U V W X V A U Y Z
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O

Words to Find
IBE, WAU, SAQA, TANO, MASI, CIBI, VAU, IRI, MAGIMAGI, BULI, BURE, TABUA

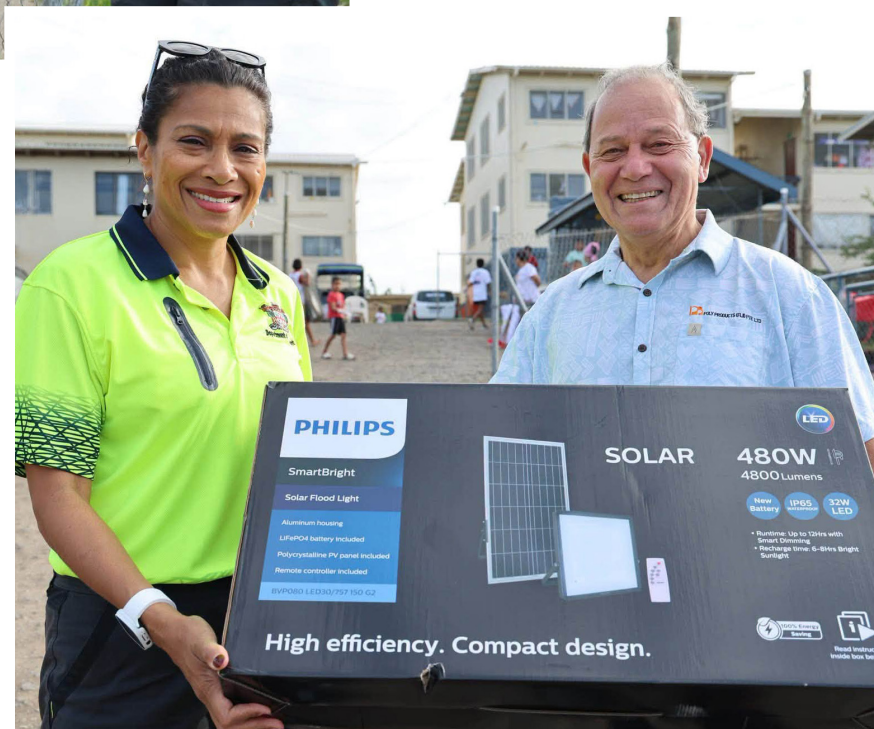
Children lead the way for a cleaner Fiji



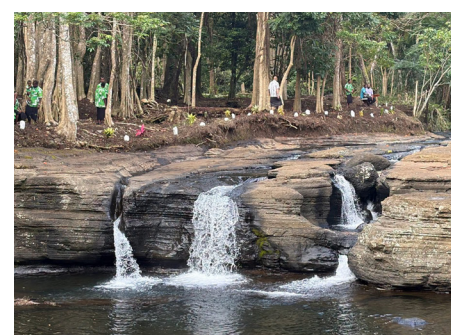
"The future of Fiji's environment begins in our homes and communities. When our children lead by example, they inspire all of us to take responsibility for protecting the places we live and the oceans that sustain us."

This was the message from the Minister for Information, Environment and Climate Change, Lynda Tabuya, as she handed over recyclable bags, hand-gloves, and hand sanitiser to children of the Lagilagi Settlement to support their community clean-up campaign.

Photo: SUPPLIED



New eco-tourism destination opens in Nabalabala village, Ra



A new eco-tourism destination in Nabalabala Village, Ra, is expected to create new income opportunities for local resource owners while strengthening forest conservation and showcasing Fiji's natural and cultural heritage.

The Navatuvoka Eco-Tourism and Forest Park was officially opened to promote sustainable tourism, protect the area's rich biodiversity and support community-led economic development through eco-tourism, handicrafts, guided tours and local food services.

Photos: SUPPLIED



Timely, accurate information at heart of ministry's priorities



As the way people consume information continues to evolve at unprecedented speed, the Ministry of Information and National Archives of Fiji is strengthening its focus on delivering timely, accurate and credible information to the public.

This was at the centre of a strategic planning workshop held as the new financial year begins, bringing Ministry staff together to reflect on the previous year's achievements and map out priorities and approaches for the year ahead.

Photos: WANSHIKA KUMAR



Nakavu women turn to poultry farming for additional income



Women in Nakavu Village, Veivatuloa, Namosi, will now be able to generate additional income for their households through a new poultry farming project supported under the Government's Self-Help Programme (SHP).

Funded at a cost of more than \$48,000, the Nakavu Village Women's Poultry Project provides the women's group with poultry shed materials, drinkers, feeders, chicks and poultry feed to establish a sustainable poultry farming enterprise. The project will directly benefit more than 380 villagers across 167 households, with opportunities also extending to neighbouring communities in Veivatuloa.

Photos: SUPPLIED



Mother of all carnivals- Hibiscus- and Suva City over the years!

As the capital city gears up to mark the 70th Hibiscus Carnival, famously called the “mother of all carnivals” this month, here’s a look back at the 1968 celebrations.

With the carnival reverting to the venue that has held the greatest number of the festivities over the years, Albert Park, most youngsters would have little recollection of how things were back in the days.

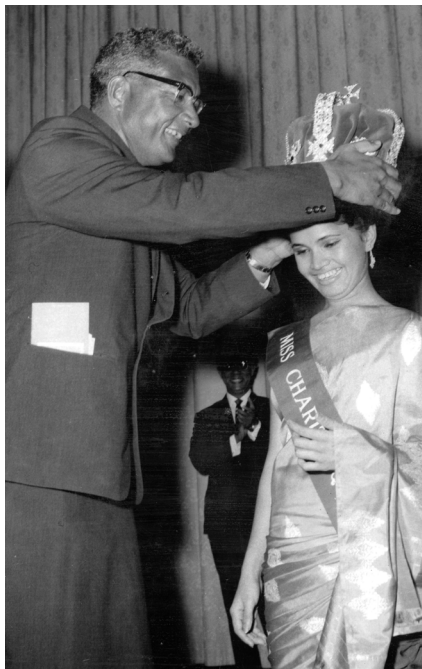
These photos, kept in the safe hands of the National Archives of Fiji, brings back the memories stuck in the annals of history of the capital city and for the younger generation, a peek into the past.

As an homage to how the Suva City grew from a small colonial town to the first city, declared in 1953, and home to people of all walks of life.

Despite no major attractions for the tourists seeking adventures or thrills, it has in its quite way many interesting sites for those wanting to visit the Fiji Museum, the botanical gardens or simply sitting under the historic ivi tree.

Intertwined in the modern architecture are the old colonial buildings that have fitted themselves like a glove as the capital city took a more modern turn.

In these photos, the curious readers are invited to spot those structures that still stand in their majestic glory.



Did you know!

THE TAGIMOUCIA

Fiji's endemic and elusive national flower

The Tagimoucia is Fiji's endemic and elusive national flower, as well as one of the rarest flowers on Earth. Its bright crimson and white petals grow in clusters, and from a young age, all Fijians are told about the beautiful but tragic love story that was connected to origins of the flower.



High in the misty mountains of Taveuni, Fiji's “Garden Island,” blooms this flower, so rare it can only be seen for a few months each year—and only in one place on Earth.

The Tagimoucia (*Medinilla waterhousei*) is a striking plant with cascading clusters of red and white flowers, flourishing exclusively in the cool volcanic highlands around Tagimoucia Lake.

To see the Tagimoucia, visitors need to hike through the lush rainforests of Taveuni and ascend De Voeux Peak. At an altitude of 2,000 meters, often shrouded in mist, lies Tagimoucia Lake—the only place on Earth where this rare flower grows.

The journey is as rewarding as the destination, offering incredible views and a chance to witness this extraordinary bloom in its unique, remote habitat.

Despite numerous attempts to cultivate the Tagimoucia elsewhere in Fiji, the plant defiantly resists all efforts. It thrives exclusively in its natural environment, this characteristic only enhances the flower's charm, making it a symbol of Taveuni's distinctive landscape.

According to the villagers of Somosomo in Taveuni, the beauty of the flower is in its name: Tagi (cry) - mo (to) - ucui (be like) - au (me). One such translation is, to ‘cry myself to sleep’. Though there are many translations to the name, this one is more widely accepted.

The Tagimoucia represents more than just a rare botanical flower; it embodies themes of love and loss.

BE-GREEN gives Koronatoga hope for better livelihoods

By SERAN DEVI and JACKSON TUVICI

FOR Koronatoga villageTuraga ni Koro, Epeli Tumomo, the launch of the Fiji Blue Economy and Green Community Development Programme (BE-GREEN) represents more than a Government initiative.

BE-GREEN, Mr Tumomo explained, was an opportunity to give the youth of the village, which sits in Navatu District, Cakaudrove, a better path while strengthening livelihoods.

Originally from Koronatoga in Cakaudrove and with maternal links to Tabia, Macutata, the headman said the village depended largely on fishing, farming and copra for income.

Mr Tumomo said copra remained an important weekly source of income for villagers, particularly for meeting household expenses such as school bus fares.

However, he said one of the major concerns facing the village was drug use among

young men.

“We are thankful that the Prime Minister has come to launch this BE-GREEN project here in Koronatoga as this will hugely benefit our youth,” Mr Tumomo said.

He said the programme could help divert young people from drugs by giving them opportunities to take part in productive activities and take ownership of projects that would benefit the wider community.

Mr Tumomo said he was informed about Koronatoga’s selection by Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, Sakiusa Tubuna.

He believed the five-year programme could also help villagers improve the marketing and value of existing produce such as yaqona, particularly when farmers were receiving low prices despite the high effort involved in production.

He said climate change was already affecting the village through flooding during high tides and landslides damaging root crops and yaqona plantations.



Youth of Koronatoga village in Navatu District, Cakaudrove, happy to be part of the Fiji Blue Economy and Green Community Development Programme (BE-GREEN), a Government initiative that could help divert young people from drugs by giving them opportunities to take part in productive activities. **Photo: SERAN DEVI**

Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, while launching the BE-GREEN, said the programme would strengthen rural livelihoods, food security and climate resilience while creating opportunities for women and young people.

He said the programme would support

stronger farms, healthier fishing grounds, improved market access and new opportunities for rural businesses.

The programme is expected to reach thousands of households across Vanua Levu, with priority given to women, youth and the indigenous communities.

Sugarcane farmers urged not to lose hope despite challenges



Sugarcane farmer Azfeen Ali with his family. **Photo: SERAN DEVI**

By SERAN DEVI

SUGARCANE farmer Azfeen Ali has encouraged fellow growers, particularly younger farmers, not to lose hope despite mounting costs and shrinking profits, saying he still believes the industry can recover.

Mr Ali, who farms 31 acres of sugarcane and also operates a 93-acre beef cattle farm, said while many farmers were under immense financial pressure, they should continue working hard and remain optimistic.

“I want to tell farmers of my age and the younger generation not to lose heart. Continue working hard and hold onto hope. I believe this industry will improve, and one day we will all benefit,” he said.

His message comes as many sugarcane farmers continue to grapple with rising labour, transport, fuel and farming costs which was the reason he now diversifies by planting other crops.

Mr Ali said many people assumed farmers were making significant money from sugarcane, but the reality was very different. A lifelong sugarcane farmer, Mr

Ali said he had worked in the fields since childhood alongside his parents before taking over the family farm following his mother’s passing two years ago.

Reflecting on the industry’s decline, he said the start of the crushing season no longer brought the excitement it once did.

“When we were young, hearing the mill would open meant happiness because work was starting and money would flow into many households. Today, people hear the mill is opening and say, ‘The headache is starting again.’”

While acknowledging government assistance through road upgrades, subsidies and top-up payments, Mr Ali said support alone could not offset rising production costs and declining profitability.

He also admitted he had considered reducing the area under sugarcane and diversifying into integrated farming, including sheep, goat, fish and prawn farming, to improve the long-term sustainability of his business.

Despite the hardships, Mr Ali said he remained hopeful the industry would recover and encouraged fellow farmers to stay committed to sugarcane while working towards a better future.

Grant to strengthen safety and unity in Soasoa community



The Soasoa Community Evacuation Centre/Church is a work in progress which has received a boost of over \$12,000 in funding from the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs. **Photo: SERAN DEVI**

By SERAN DEVI

FOR years, residents of Soasoa in Labasa have lived with the uncertainty of facing cyclones in ageing homes with no dedicated evacuation centre.

Now, this was set to change after the community received a \$12,681.21 grant through the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs to construct an evacuation centre that will also serve as a church, providing families with a safer place to shelter during natural disasters.

Community representative, Saula Rokobukai, said the project was a significant milestone for the settlement and one the villagers had long hoped for.

“We thank Almighty God for listening to our prayers for a long time, and we also thank the Government for approving this grant,” Mr Rokobukai said.

“This project is for our church and evacuation centre, and we are very grateful for this assistance.”

The grant was provided through building materials supplied directly by a hardware company.

Mr Rokobukai said the need for an evacuation centre had become increasingly important, with many homes in the community-built years ago and unable to provide adequate protection during severe weather events.

“Some of our houses are old, so we needed a place that can protect us during the hurricane season,” he said.

The new facility will serve about 42 people from six households in the community.

Mr Rokobukai said the construction had already brought people together, with families volunteering their time and labour to build the facility.

“Before this project, we were a bit separated but now it has brought us closer as one family,” he said.

“It has united us because everyone is working together and helping one another.”

He said the project would leave a lasting legacy for future generations while encouraging young people to continue working together for the benefit of the community.

Despite the progress, Mr Rokobukai said residents continued to face challenges, including termite damage to timber used for housing construction.

He said timber required treatment before it could be used, and communities often relied on assistance to access the necessary chemicals.

Mr Rokobukai said the six households shared a single water connection, but low water pressure meant their 15,000-litre water tank was often not filled, forcing residents to rely on a nearby creek for drinking water.

He acknowledged the Government’s support in providing an additional 15,000-litre water tank, which would improve water storage during dry periods.

Mr Rokobukai thanked the Government for supporting the project and the community members who had contributed their time and effort towards constructing the evacuation centre.

“This is our first project, and we are really happy. I also thank my brothers and everyone who is helping to build our evacuation centre.”

New child rehabilitation centres, aged care upgrades backed in \$211m Budget

By SERAN DEVI

CHILDREN struggling with substance abuse and elderly Fijians living in ageing care homes are set to receive improved care under the 2026–2027 National Budget with an allocation of \$211 million to the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection to strengthen services for the country’s most vulnerable.

Speaking during the Budget debate in Parliament in July, the line Minister, Sashi Kiran, said the funding would respond to the growing demand for child protection services while improving aged care and maintaining welfare support for more than 130,000 vulnerable Fijians.

“A major initiative is the establishment of a dedicated alcohol and drug recovery centre for boys in Lautoka in partnership with Empower Pacific, alongside a specialised rehabilitation facility in Suva being developed with Habitat for Humanity for

boys found living on the streets,” Minister Kiran said.

She said the facilities were needed because children exposed to illicit substances and complex health conditions, including HIV, could not be accommodated in existing residential care homes and required specialised rehabilitation before they could be successfully reintegrated into formal education.

“The Budget will also fund the upgrade of the Fiji Juvenile Rehabilitation and Development Centre and support the implementation of the Child Care and Protection Act and Child Justice Act to strengthen child safeguarding and rehabilitation services,” she said.

For older persons, Ms Kiran announced that work would begin on replacing the ageing Suva Golden Age Home, which she said had outlived its structural lifespan after nearly 80 years.

She said residents from the Lautoka Golden Age Home had already been relocated from termite-infested buildings to a renovated



Golden Age Home residents visiting the Fiji Museum. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

interim facility while plans for a new purpose-built complex were being finalised.

“Upgrades to the Valelevu HART Nursing Facility are also expected to be completed next month, creating accommodation for 60 more elderly people requiring specialised care.”

Beyond infrastructure, the Budget continues

investment in disability inclusion, women’s economic empowerment and protection services for survivors of gender-based violence, while modernising Fiji’s social protection system through digital reforms and expanding the Ministry’s REACH Programme to deliver government services to more remote and maritime communities.

Tourism Minister backs responsible budget for growth



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism, Viliame Gavoka, (sitting fifth from the left) and UN Resident Coordinator Dirk Wagener (sitting fourth from the left) lead delegates on Vanua Balavu during the final stop of the Lau Tourism Scoping Mission. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

By JACKSON TUVICI

THE 2026–2027 National Budget has been hailed as a responsible and disciplined plan that protects Fiji’s tourism and aviation sectors while responding to global economic challenges.

This was relayed by Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Viliame Gavoka, during the budget debate during the July sitting of Parliament.

The Ministry has been allocated \$75.8 million, down from \$93 million in the previous financial year, which DPM Gavoka said reflects the realities of rising fuel costs, increasing government operating expenses and pressure on public revenue, while ensuring continued investment in sectors that drive economic growth.

“The global fuel crisis has affected every sector, every household, and every corner of our economy. When the country faces pressure, government must respond as one. No ministry stands outside this national reality.”

However, he said the Government has not stepped away from tourism and civil aviation.

“We have reduced where we must, protected where we should, and invested where it matters most.”

Among the key initiatives in the Budget

are new tax incentives for iTaukei eco and cultural tourism developments, continued investment in airport upgrades, support for community-based tourism enterprises, and a \$200 million Government guarantee for Fiji Airways to help the national carrier manage the global fuel crisis while maintaining flight capacity.

“Fiji Airways is a strategic national asset. It brings majority of our visitors to our shores, supports jobs across the tourism industry, and anchors Fiji’s position as the aviation hub of the South Pacific,” DPM Gavoka said.

He also said that Tourism Fiji’s allocation has been reduced to \$41.77 million, including \$33 million for destination marketing, but stressed that marketing efforts would become more targeted and accountable to maximise returns.

DPM Gavoka also highlighted \$10 million allocated this year for the World Bank-supported tourism development programme in Vanua Levu, aimed at improving infrastructure, expanding tourism opportunities and supporting small businesses and rural communities.

He said the Budget also strengthens support for micro, small and medium tourism enterprises, increasing the Tourism MSME Fund to \$500,000, while implementation of the new Tourism Act 2026 will modernise governance and provide stronger support for emerging tourism products.

Highest allocation for non-sugar agriculture sector



Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Tomasi Tunabuna, hands over a new \$105,000 subsidized excavator to Nakaubeqa Cooperative at Waiqanake Village to boost local farm mechanization and crop production. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

By WANSHIKA KUMAR

THE 2026–2027 National Budget has delivered the largest-ever allocation to Fiji’s non-sugar agriculture sector, with \$124.7 million allocated, an increase of 8.2 percent.

Speaking in Parliament, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry, Tomasi Tunabuna, said the Ministry’s total allocation of \$221 million was aimed at strengthening food security, reducing food imports, mitigating the impacts of global economic, social and climate challenges, and driving a commercial revolution in rural communities.

He said the Government views agriculture, waterways and the sugar industry as the engines of economic sustainability.

Pointing to the record \$187.2 million in fresh and frozen crop and livestock exports achieved in 2025, Minister Tunabuna said the Government was targeting \$1 billion in fresh and frozen non-sugar agricultural exports by 2030.

For the 2026–2027 National Budget, the Minister said the Ministry’s vision is “building a resilient, productive, inclusive and commercially driven agriculture sector.”

Minister Tunabuna outlined five key priorities for the 2026–2027 Budget allocation:

- First, improving food and nutrition security for all Fijians, ensuring that every household has access to safe, nutritious and affordable food.
- Second, improving livelihoods and farming households by increasing farmer incomes, creating employment opportunities and empowering women, youth and rural communities.

• Third, improving the adoption of sustainable resource management and climate-smart agriculture to strengthen resilience against climate change, natural disasters and external shocks, including the current fuel crisis.

• Fourth, increasing commercial agriculture through enhanced production, mechanisation, market access, value addition, agro-processing and export development.

• And fifth, improving Ministry performance and service delivery through modernising agricultural institutions, strengthening extension services, advancing digital agriculture and ensuring that Government services reach out to every farming community across Fiji.

Minister Tunabuna described the 2026–2027 National Budget as “a declaration of intent.”

“It is a promise to the farmers that their hard work will be rewarded with returns on their investments. It is a promise to the young graduates that agriculture is a high-tech, high-return career path. It is a promise to every Fijian family that their food security is our highest priority.

“We are building a Fiji that is self-reliant. A Fiji that doesn’t just participate in the global economy but leads it in the sectors where we have a natural, God-given advantage.”

Reflecting on the Ministry’s achievements during the 2025–2026 financial year, Minister Tunabuna said 1.6 million planting materials were distributed through crop extension programmes, with a further half a million provided through the Ministry’s research stations.

He said the Ministry also supported 950 livestock farmers by distributing 2,500 improved breeding stock for sheep, goats, pigs and poultry.

\$33.1m boost for iTaukei Development

By JACKSON TUVICI

THE Minister of iTaukei Affairs, Ifereimi Vasu has described the 2026-2027 National Budget as a responsible and balanced plan that supports economic growth while strengthening indigenous communities, traditional institutions and resource owners.

Speaking in Parliament during the budget debate, the Minister said for the 2026–2027 financial year, the Ministry has been allocated \$33.1 million to strengthen provincial administration, village governance, resource-owner development, technical and vocational training, village infrastructure and institutional reforms.

“To support the work of the Provincial Council, the 14 Provincial Council receives a total grant of \$7.1 million. The councils are the main link between Government, traditional leaders and communities across Fiji.”

“This grant will support provincial administration, the planning and delivery of development priorities, stronger reporting and accountability, and close a link between villages, the kina, provincial, and the national planning.”

“To carry out its national governance,

coordination, and service responsibility, the iTaukei Affairs Board will receive a grant of \$3.2 million. The Board will continue to support the Provincial Council’s oversee the delivery of village and provincial development plans, gender and economic and community programs, and coordinate conservation, urban outreach, and other initiatives affecting the iTaukei community.”

“To support the service of our traditional and community leaders, a total of \$4.2 million is provided.”

Reflecting on the Ministry’s achievements over the past four years, the Minister said the restoration of the Great Council of Chiefs, strengthening of traditional governance, completion of integrated village development plans for all 1,173 villages, and support for indigenous businesses have laid a stronger foundation for future development.

“Traditional governance was strengthened through chiefly title confirmations, Provincial and Tikina meetings, leadership training, and review of the wider iTaukei administrations,” Minister Vasu said.

He noted that 190 village projects worth more than \$4.2 million had improved sanitation and community infrastructure,



Minister for iTaukei, Ifereimi Vasu, during the signing of the 2026–2027 Costed Operations Plan, alongside Grant Agreements with the iTaukei Affairs Board and Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD) Nadave held recently. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

while the iTaukei Affairs Board supported 34 businesses and delivered 108 financial literacy and business advisory sessions across 30 communities.

The Minister also highlighted the success of the iTaukei Wealth Fund, which helped unlock \$25.7 million in approved lending for resource-owner development projects, alongside initiatives to expand technical training, land management, marine conservation and indigenous rights.

“Na Qelemaroroi Holdings was launched to increase landowners’ participation in commercial development, while the

Taukei Plaza 1, Taukei Plaza 2, and FHL Tower demonstrate the growing strength of indigenous investment. The TLTB Education Scholarship Framework was also rolled out, creating new education and skills pathways for itaukei students,” Minister Vasu said.

The Minister said the funding will help strengthen traditional leadership, expand economic opportunities for indigenous resource owners, improve village infrastructure and support technical skills training for young people.

Budget casts wider net for fisheries, forestry growth



Minister for Fisheries and Forestry Alitia Bainivalu officially commissioned the Elroi Nursery Project last week in Vuci, Nausori as part of a tri-partite partnership between the Government, Fiji Pine Trust and All Nations Christian Fellowship (ANCF) / Mt Moriah Church.

Photo: SUPPLIED

By SERAN DEVI

FAMILIES depending on fishing and rural landowners will benefit from a major Government investment of \$54 million in Fiji’s fisheries and forestry sectors.

This sum has been allocated in the 2026-2027 National Budget, directed towards creating jobs, boosting exports, strengthening food security and protecting the country’s natural resources.

Speaking during the budget debate during the July sitting of Parliament, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Alitia Bainivalu, said the investment was about securing livelihoods while ensuring Fiji’s natural resources were protected for future generations.

A key budget initiative was the establishment of a \$5 million Tuna Development Fund, aimed at strengthening Fiji’s position in the global tuna market and increasing returns from one of the country’s most valuable marine resources.

The Ministry will invest \$515,000 in electronic monitoring systems to improve transparency, combat illegal fishing and strengthen compliance with international fisheries standards, while new funding will support offshore fisheries development and modernise fisheries legislation.

Describing the importance of the

sector, Minister Bainivalu said fisheries remained central to the lives of many Fijians.

“The fisheries sector is more than an industry it is the soul of our villages, the strength of our economy and the hope of our children.”

Support for seaweed farming, crab fattening and commercial aquaculture will create new income opportunities while easing pressure on inshore fish stocks.

New fisheries stations at Koro, Cawaro, Matakunea and Natovi, together with ice-making facilities for maritime communities, are expected to reduce post-harvest losses and improve access to domestic and export markets.

The forestry sector has also received a significant boost, with funding directed towards restoring degraded forests, expanding commercial pine development, strengthening research and upgrading training facilities.

To meet the national target of planting 30 million trees, with more than 27 million trees already planted, an allocated of \$2 million has been provided.

Funding will also support maritime pine harvesting, research into high-value species such as sandalwood and improvements to forestry training centres, initiatives expected to generate employment while promoting the sustainable management of Fiji’s forests.

Govt boosts rural infrastructure and evacuation centre funding in 2026–2027 Budget



Villagers of Nausori Highland in the district of Namataku, in the interior of Navosa with Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, Mosese Bultavu, following the commissioning of the Nasaucoko Community Access Road. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

By MELI NAISELE

THE Government has significantly increased funding for disaster preparedness and rural infrastructure in the 2026–2027 National Budget, reinforcing its commitment to improving the resilience and connectivity of Fiji’s rural and maritime communities.

Speaking during the parliamentary debate on the national budget, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Risk Management, Mosese Bultavu, welcomed the increased investment in the construction and retrofitting of evacuation centres, describing it as a vital step towards protecting vulnerable communities from the growing impacts of climate change.

“I welcome the significant increase in funding for the Construction and Retrofitting of Evacuation Centres, which has increased by over \$1 million to a total allocation of \$2.2 million,” Minister Bultavu said.

He said as the Minister responsible for Disaster Risk Management, he understood the importance of investing in resilient infrastructure that safeguards lives during emergencies.

“Climate-induced disasters are becoming more frequent and intense, and communities must have access to evacuation facilities that are safe, accessible and capable of meeting minimum standards during emergencies,”

he said.

Minister Bultavu also highlighted the allocation of \$3 million to the Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges Programme, saying improved access infrastructure remains essential for the social and economic development of rural communities.

“Reliable access infrastructure remains fundamental to rural development because it connects people to schools, health facilities, markets and essential government services, for many rural families, a properly constructed access road or footbridge is a pathway to economic opportunity, improved education, better healthcare and greater social inclusion,” he said.

Minister Bultavu said the continued investment in rural connectivity would be complemented by ongoing funding for the Sawanikula to Tubarua Road Project, which will progress into its second phase in the remote district of Noimalu, Naitasiri.

He said the project would improve transport links for several remote villages, reduce travel difficulties and strengthen access to essential services while supporting agricultural production and market opportunities.

“Once completed, this road will improve connectivity for several remote villages, reduce travel hardships, facilitate agricultural production and market access, and improve access to education and health services.”



Securing Fiji's future livelihoods

By AZARIA FAREEN

THE Government continues to revitalise the national employment landscape, aggressively deploying millions in targeted fiscal investments to buffer local families against evolving macroeconomic pressures. By strategically expanding training resources and strengthening workforce readiness, the Government has been proactively connecting job seekers with sustainable career paths to ensure that no worker was left behind in Fiji's expanding economy. Speaking during the 2026-2027 National Budget debate in Parliament recently, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations, Agni Deo Singh, said that "for thousands of ordinary citizens, this workforce overhaul is transforming personal vulnerabilities into long-

term financial independence".

"To specifically address critical labour shortages, the state has injected a comprehensive \$14.8 million total allocation into the Ministry, and a vital cornerstone of this human-centric recovery is the \$2.51 million dedicated to the National Employment Centre (NEC), directly powering local placement programs, digital employment services, and workplace attachments," Minister Singh emphasised.

"Rather than utilising short-term fixes, the Government is systematically resolving skills gaps through structural training adjustments," he added.

"From January 1, 2027, 50 per cent of the National Training and Productivity Centre levy will be redirected toward hands-on training and technical skill development, and to incentivise private sector onboarding, businesses

will now benefit from a 200 per cent tax deduction on eligible employer spending for worker upskilling."

Reflecting on the human triumph behind these policy adjustments, the Minister reaffirmed that this strategy focuses directly on providing economic security for everyday families.

"As Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations, I welcome the budget's strong focus on productivity, skills, and employment."

"By rebuilding vocational pathways and establishing equitable local opportunities, Fiji's employment reforms are doing far more than filling vacant roles—they are restoring job stability, fostering social justice, and lighting up a brighter economic future for families nationwide," he added.



Minister for Employment, Production and Workplace Relations, Agni Deo Singh, on his way to Parliament for the 2026-2027 National Budget last month. Photo: SUPPLIED

Environment budget focuses on action



Members of the Kadavu Under-20 rugby team in Nadi during their community clean-up drive. Photo: SUPPLIED

By WANSHIKA KUMAR

“THIS Government is moving from promises or plans and delivering practical action.”

This was the reaffirmation by the Minister for Information, Environment and Climate Change, Lynda Tabuya, as she spoke in support of the allocation for the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change in the 2026–2027 National Budget during the July sitting of Parliament.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has been allocated a total of \$10.6 million in the 2026-2027 National Budget.

Reflecting on the Ministry's achievements over the past financial year, Minister Tabuya said the Government had strengthened environmental legislation by updating the Environment Management Act and the Litter Act, while implementing the Climate Change Act to ensure a coordinated approach to preparing Fiji for the impacts of climate change.

"We have improved our environmental monitoring and strengthened enforcement so development can continue while protecting our environment," she stated.

The Minister also highlighted the recent approval of a FJ\$117 million Green Climate Fund project, which will restore forests, protect water sources, improve biodiversity and support community livelihoods.

"Every dollar we secure from overseas partners is one less dollar our taxpayers

have to find."

She said the 2026–2027 Budget continues the Government's investment in waste management, including support for the Naboro Landfill, while tougher penalties under the strengthened Litter Act will help address illegal dumping.

Minister Tabuya said community-led initiatives such as the Trashboom programme, school waste management projects and the Return and Earn recycling programme are encouraging greater public participation in keeping Fiji clean.

She also called on all Fijians to take greater responsibility for protecting the environment, stressing that environmental stewardship is a shared responsibility.

"Protecting the environment is not only Government's responsibility as government, opposition, or parliament. It is for everyone.

"Please, dispose of your rubbish properly. Fines for littering have increased, and for the first time, companies that illegally dump, even within their own yards, face penalties. If you want to make money by polluting Fiji, then expect to answer before the law.

"Our forests, rivers, reefs and oceans are not just beautiful for the tourists. They provide food. They create jobs. They attract tourists. They support our farmers and fishermen."

"When we protect nature, we protect our economy and we protect the livelihoods of thousands of Fijian families."

Govt expands PSB grant to include print media



Minister for Information, Environment and Climate Change, Lynda Tabuya, visited the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) to explore stronger collaboration between the Government and FBC. Photo: WANSHIKA KUMAR

By WANSHIKA KUMAR

THE Ministry of Information is expanding its Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Grant with the inclusion of print media for the first time under the 2026-2027 National Budget.

The 2026-2027 National Budget, which was passed in Parliament with 35 Members of Parliament voting in favour, allocates \$7 million for Public Service Broadcasting, with \$375,000 allocated to each of the dailies.

This marks the first time print media outlets will be eligible to access the grant, reflecting the Government's commitment to fairness and media freedom.

Speaking during the Parliamentary debate on the 2026-27 National Budget, Minister for Information, Lynda Tabuya stressed that "This is not about funding these media" but about making use of the online reach of media organisations to deliver important public information to Fijians.

The Minister said the PSB programme enables the Government to work with media organisations to ensure vital public information reaches all Fijians, including those living in rural and maritime communities.

"Now that news has largely moved across platforms from print to online platforms, we work with our media organisations, mainstream media, to reach our people through the Public Service Broadcasting Grant.

"Of course, they still have their own commercial operations, which they fund themselves, but we work with them on public service broadcasting community messages. Because government cannot do it alone."

Minister Tabuya emphasised the importance of ensuring accurate and timely information reaches the public, saying effective communication helps people make informed decisions, reduces fear and confusion, and can even save lives.

"Stories can spread across the country in minutes. And of course, false information can create fear, confusion and division. That is why the Government has a responsibility to communicate clearly, honestly and quickly.

Elaborating further, she said during times of disaster, health emergencies or even when Fiji faced the recent global fuel crisis, people needed facts—not rumours

The Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to media freedom, noting that the recently launched SAUTU Counter-Disinformation Framework was intended to strengthen public awareness rather than restrict freedom of expression.

"Earlier this year we launched the SAUTU Counter-Disinformation Framework. It is not about censoring people or restricting free speech. It is about helping Fijians to recognise false information, think critically and make informed decisions.

"We believe the best way to fight misinformation is with better information."



Fiji FOCUS



Avishay Singh proudly displays his Fiji Development Bank (FDB) Business Excellence Award, recognising the growth and impact of his enterprise. **Photo: WANSHIKA KUMAR**

FDB awards for 'socio-economic pillars'

By SERAN DEVI

"SMALL and medium enterprises are more than economic contributors. They are the social and economic pillars of our nation."

These sentiments relayed by President Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu at the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) National Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Awards 2025 in Suva, resonates with small but impactful contribution one of the award recipients has had on its customers.

A family business that started with party ice has grown into an agribusiness processing about two tonnes of cassava a week and providing a market for more than 500 farmers.

Shahils Party Ice and Frozen Supplies, based in Koronivia, was named Best Agribusiness SME of the Year at the Fiji Development Bank National SME Awards 2025.

Owner Avishay Singh said the business began in 2016 when his father saw an opportunity to produce party ice for canteens. The family invested its own savings to buy a small ice machine, with Mr Singh, his siblings and parents working together to establish the business.

"It was just me, my brother, my sister and my mother working together. Using our savings, we bought a small ice machine and that is how we launched our business," he said.

The business later expanded into supermarkets and identified an opportunity in the demand for locally processed root crops.

It began processing cassava and dalo before expanding its range to include packaged cassava chips.

Today, the company purchases cassava from more than 500 farmers, including those in remote areas, providing them with a regular market for their produce.

Mr Singh said Government assistance had also played a role in the company's expansion.

A freezer truck received through a co-contribution grant scheme allowed the business to expand into Western Division markets while increasing the amount of produce it could purchase from farmers.

The company also received packing and sealing equipment and an ice machine in 2022, which enabled it to supply ice to local fishermen.

He said access to finance had been one of the biggest challenges during the early years of the business.

"Nobody supported my father financially, so we had to stand on our own two feet," Mr Singh said.

The latest award is the second FDB recognition for Shahils Party Ice and Frozen Supplies. He said its first award helped raise the company's profile and created opportunities to enter new markets.

The business is now preparing for its next stage of growth, with plans to expand further into the Western Division and introduce new products.

Mr Singh encouraged young people to consider agriculture as a career, saying Fiji had significant potential in the sector.

His comments come as the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship continues to grow within Fiji's SME sector.

President Lalabalavu also described SMEs as "the social and economic pillars of our nation" and said they remained the "heartbeat of Fiji's economy".

He said innovation did not always require sophisticated technology, but could involve practical improvements that increased productivity, sustainability and access to markets.

The President also stressed that business growth should benefit families, employees, suppliers and communities.