

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 13TH MARCH, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 13TH MARCH, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.50 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation; the honourable Minister of Finance, Commerce and Business Development; the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications; honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu; honourable F.S. Koya; honourable P.K. Bala; honourable P.D. Kumar; and honourable V. Nath.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 12th March, 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to our final sitting for this week. I also welcome all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Withdrawal of Motion

Honourable Members, please note that I have received a notification from the honourable Minister of Justice and Acting Attorney-General that he is withdrawing the motion under his name on today's Order Paper. On that note, the motion under Item 9 on today's Order Paper is hereby withdrawn

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE OF THE ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that I will allow the honourable Prime Minister extra time as he may need to respond to some of the contributions made in the course of this week. Bells will also be suspended for this instance only.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen – *ni sa bula vinaka*, a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this morning to give my right of reply at the conclusion of the debate on the Address by His Excellency the President and to respond to some of the issues raised by honourable Members throughout the course of this week's deliberations. I thank all honourable Members who have contributed to this very important debate on the Address of His Excellency the President. It was not only the Address that was highlighted by the honourable Members of the Opposition, it was also Government's plan of action for what is ahead of us.

The contributions from both sides of the House demonstrate the depth of concern that Members have for the future of our nation. While there have been differences in perspective, I believe there is a shared commitment among us to ensure that Fiji continues to move forward in unity, stability and prosperity.

The President's Address set out the Government's strategic direction for the year that is ahead – one anchored in inclusive economic growth, good governance, social protection, national unity and resilience. I wish to take this opportunity to respond to the key concerns that have been raised by honourable Members and to clarify the concrete actions that the Government is undertaking and will undertake to address those issues.

On Education Reform, Mr. Speaker, Sir, several honourable Members had raised concerns regarding curriculum reform, teacher welfare and teacher deployment. The Government recognises that education is the cornerstone of Fiji's development. Through the Ministry of Education's ongoing National Curriculum Review, work is underway to modernise the school curriculum to reflect the realities of a diverse, multicultural and digitally connected Fiji. This review includes strengthening content on civic values, multicultural understanding, national identity and social cohesion, ensuring that our young people grow up with a deep or even deeper appreciation of the diversity that defines our nation.

On the matter of teacher remuneration, the Government is progressing the phased review of the teachers' salary structures and career progression pathways as part of the broader Public Service reforms. Our aim is to ensure that teachers are fairly remunerated and that the profession remains attractive to the next generation of educators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, concerns regarding teacher safety have also been noted. The Government, through the Ministry for Education in collaboration with the Fiji Police Force and school management committees are developing a Teacher Safety and Protection Framework that will strengthen protocols for addressing harassment, violence and threats against educators. Teachers must be able to perform their duties in an environment that is safe, respectful and supportive.

Tertiary Education and TSLS Services, issues were raised regarding the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Service (TSLS) and they are acknowledged. Sir, TSLS continues to support thousands of Fijian students with scholarships and loans to access tertiary education.

To improve service delivery, the Government has directed the modernisation of TSLS administrative systems to reduce delays in payments and ensure more efficient processing of student allowances and tuition payments. We are committed to ensuring that no deserving student is prevented from completing their education due to administrative delays or financial hardship.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, concerns were raised regarding case backlogs with the Judiciary and the

need to review certain legislation. The Government respects the independence of the Judiciary while continuing to work with judicial authorities to strengthen court capacity, digital case management systems, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in order to reduce case backlogs.

The honourable Members also referred to possible reviews of legislation, such as the Small Claims Tribunal Act 1991, Family Law Act 2003, Protection of Animals Act 1957 and the Mining Act 1965. These are matters that will be considered as part of Government's ongoing legislative modernisation programme, which seeks to ensure that Fiji's legal framework remains responsive to contemporary social, economic, and environmental realities.

The Public Service, Mr. Speaker, Sir, several honourable Members have raised concerns about governance, institutional integrity, and the public sector appointments. This Government is firmly committed to merit-based appointments, transparency, and institutional independence. Reforms being implemented through the Public Service Commission and the Civil Service Reform Programmes are aimed at strengthening professionalism, performance evaluation, and accountability across the public sector.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that our civil servants are treated with dignity and respect. As noted by honourable Members, the Government is working on strengthening policies that ensure protection, professionalism, and integrity within the public service. Where allegations of misconduct arise within public institutions, they must be investigated through the appropriate independent processes. The Government supports transparent investigations and due process, as these are fundamental to maintaining public confidence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of honourable Members have highlighted challenges in the health sector, one as recently as last night or yesterday, about the lift at CWM Hospital. That was addressed yesterday, and we are very grateful for those that fixed that little problem. We have concerns about shortage of doctors and nurses, and the condition of health facilities. I also thank the Ministry for Health and all the officials who were in charge of the Children's Ward when my great grandson went in for four nights last week. He came out very cheerful, very healthy.

The Government fully recognises these challenges and has prioritised health sector strengthening through multiple initiatives. Investment is being done and will be directed towards recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, upgrading hospitals and health centres, improving medical supply chains, strengthening rural and maritime health outreach services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the question of 300-bed speciality hospital, the Government confirms that preparatory work, including project structuring and investment arrangements, has been ongoing. This major health infrastructure project remains a strategic priority and will significantly expand Fiji's capacity to deliver specialised medical services domestically.

In addition, the Government is intensifying its national response to emergencies or to emerging health challenges, including the rising number of HIV cases, through prevention programmes, awareness campaigns, and expanded testing and treatment services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the economy and cost of living, these were raised by several honourable Members, we acknowledge that global economic conditions, including geopolitical conflicts, supply chain disruptions, and rising fuel prices also are attributable to supply chain disruptions, continue to affect economies worldwide. Despite these challenges, our economy has shown strong recovery following the pandemic, with continued growth in tourism investment and private sector activities.

However, growth alone is not sufficient. This Government will and remains focused on

ensuring that the benefits of economic recovery reach ordinary households. The key measures include social protection programmes for vulnerable households, support for small and medium enterprises, targeted subsidies and assistance programmes, and investment in rural and maritime development.

There have been issues raised about our debt management, which also remains a key priority. The Government will continue to pursue a balanced fiscal strategy that ensures responsible borrowing while continuing to invest in essential infrastructure and national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture remains central to Fiji's rural and national economy. Concerns regarding the sugar industry, including unharvested cane and operational challenges, have been raised by several honourable Members. The Government will continue to work closely with stakeholders, including farmers and industry institutions, to strengthen the sector through:

- Investment in cane access roads and tramline rehabilitation;
- Modernisation of milling operations;
- Support for farmer co-operatives; and
- Improved harvesting co-ordination.

Where farmers have faced losses due to operational disruptions, the Government will continue to assess appropriate support measures.

In addition, broader agricultural development programmes are underway to improve productivity, expand market access, and encourage the productive use of agricultural land. A Member raised an issue about the Special Committee on the Sugar Industry, that sat for the first time yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members have highlighted infrastructure gaps in rural and maritime communities, including roads, electricity supply, and telecommunications coverage. The Government's national infrastructure programme will continue to prioritise equitable development across all regions of Fiji, and these include:

- road rehabilitation and upgrading;
- expansion of rural electrification;
- strengthening maritime transport services; and
- improving digital connectivity and internet access.

At this stage, may I commend the honourable Minister of Public Works and the workers who are out there on the streets in the nights, not only around the main centres, but also in Vanua Levu and the road that was built in 1974 is now being improved. Thank you very much.

Addressing flooding and strengthening climate resilience is also a key focus, particularly as Fiji remains vulnerable to extreme weather events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, housing affordability remains a major national challenge. The Government is strengthening programmes that are aimed at supporting first-time homeowners, upgrading informal settlements and expanding access to affordable housing finance. Settlement upgrading initiatives include improvements to roads, drainage, water supply, electricity and sanitation and ensuring that communities experience tangible improvement in living standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rising concerns regarding drug-related activities and crimes has been raised by many honourable Members. The Government has already intensified national efforts to

combat the illegal drug trade through strengthened law enforcement operations, regional cooperation, and enhanced surveillance measures. These include increased deployment of police resources, intelligence-led operations, and the use of modern surveillance technology, including CCTV systems in high-risk areas.

However, the fight against drugs must also involve communities, families, schools and religious institutions. A whole-of-society approach is essential. Every time I talk about drugs and their influences on society, I am embarrassed because my own *tikina* is one of the worst offenders on the issue of *marijuana*. While I was there for a Government function two weeks ago, the police and their drones went around the area, and while I was still there, came back with a whole harvest of *marijuana* plants. I was embarrassed and could not hurry enough out of that area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, several honourable Members have commented on the issue of Constitutional Reform. Let me reiterate clearly, any proposed constitutional changes will be guided by the principles of transparency, public consultation and democratic legitimacy. The Government remains committed to ensuring that the Constitution evolves in a manner that strengthens democracy, protects the rights of all citizens and reflects the aspirations of the people of Fiji. We welcome constructive dialogue with the Opposition and with the broader public in this process.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Acting Attorney-General withdrew the motions that were there, and now that we are in the process of Constitutional Reform and amendment work, we will let that go through the Parliamentary process, as well as respect our efforts in and across the Chamber, multi and bilateral approach to Constitutional Reform.

On National Unity and Social Cohesion, many honourable Members and others spoke passionately about the importance of unity. Fiji's strength lies in our diversity. Our development must benefit all communities - *iTaukei*, Indo-Fijians, Rotumans, Banabans and all other citizens who call Fiji home.

The Government will continue to support programmes that promote multicultural understanding, inter-faith dialogue and inclusive development. I thank the honourable Bala for inviting me to officiate at one of his big religious gatherings later on in a few weeks' time.

We also acknowledge the importance of empowering *iTaukei* resource owners through improved participation in economic development, while ensuring the development is balanced with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some honourable Members have expressed concern about governance, institutional credibility and transparency. I want to assure this honourable House and honourable Members and the people of Fiji that the Government remains committed to strengthening accountability mechanisms, ensuring transparent decision making and respecting the independence of key institutions. Where concerns arise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they must be addressed through proper legal institutional processes. Our democracy is strengthened not by accusations alone, but by evidence, due processes and respect for the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also, through the ongoing Civil Service Reform Programmes, the Government is strengthening professionalism, performance evaluation and accountability within the public service. These reforms are designed to ensure that the civil service remains competent, impartial and focused on service delivery for all the people of Fiji. At the same time, the Government recognizes the importance of protecting the dignity and professionalism of our civil service.

Policies are being strengthened to ensure that public servants, including teachers, healthcare

workers and frontline officers, can carry out their responsibilities in a safe and respectful working environment. Where allegations of misconduct arise within the public institutions, the Government supports independent investigations conducted through the proper legal institutional frameworks. Accountability must always be guided by due processes and the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members have called for greater co-operation and unity in addressing the national challenges. The Government fully supports the spirit of collaboration and constructive engagement in the challenges facing Fiji, whether economic recovery, climate change, health care reform or strengthening rural development are not issues that can be addressed by one side of the House alone. They require collective national effort.

For this reason, the Government remains open to constructive partnership with the Opposition on key national priorities. Parliamentary Committees, consultations on major legislations and national policy dialogue provide important avenues for Members across the political spectrum to contribute to decision making.

Our democracy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is strongest when debate leads not to division but to better policy outcomes and stronger institutions. His Excellency the President's Address outlined an ambitious agenda because the challenges facing Fiji are complex and require determined leadership. This Government remains firmly committed to:

- Good governance and transparency;
- Strengthening our economy;
- Improving public services;
- Upholding democratic institutions;
- Inclusive economic growth;
- Sustainable development;
- Partnership and dialogue with all, and;
- Building a united and inclusive Fiji.

Progress will not only always be instantaneous, but it is steady, deliberate and grounded in national interest. I thank all honourable Members for their contributions and assure this honourable House that the Government will continue to work tirelessly to deliver on the commitments outlined in his Excellency the President's Address and will continue to listen. Together, we must move forward, not divided by politics, but united by our shared responsibility to build a stronger Fiji for future generations. With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members for their contribution to this debate.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Prime Minister for speaking in exercise of his right of reply.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, this is an appropriate time for our morning recess. We will now suspend proceedings for a break and Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.18 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.58 a.m.

RESTORATION OF BILLS TO THE ORDER PAPER

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 97, I hereby move:

That the following Bills be restored to the Order Paper;

- (1) Code of Conduct Bill 2025 (Bill No. 4 of 2025);
- (2) Access to Information Bill 2025 (Bill No. 5 of 2025);
- (3) Accountability and Transparency Commission Bill 2025 (Bill No. 6 of 2025);
- (4) Work Care Bill 2025 (Bill No. 7 of 2025);
- (5) Accident Compensation (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 8 of 2025);
- (6) Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 27 of 2025);
- (7) Fiji Learning Institute for Public Service Bill 2025 (Bill No. 32 of 2025);
- (8) Education Bill 2025 (Bill No. 34 of 2025);
- (9) Personal Insolvency, Financial Rehabilitation and Entrepreneurial Rescue Bill 2025 (Bill No. 40 of 2025);
- (10) Rights of Indigenous Peoples Bill 2025 (Bill No. 37 of 2025);
- (11) Criminal Records Bill 2025 (Bill No. 41 of 2005);
- (12) Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 (Bill No. 42 of 2025);
- (13) Mahogany Bill 2025 (Bill No. 45 of 2025); and
- (14) National Referendum Bill 2025 (Bill No. 46 of 2025).

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 97 primarily sets out the procedures for the Reinstatement of Bills to the Order Paper. Honourable Members will recall that Parliament was prorogued on Monday, 8th December, 2025. As a consequence of this prorogation, all Bills lapsed, resulting in the suspension or cessation of all associated processes where applicable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 97(1) provides that any Bills which lapse during the previous session of Parliament may be restored to the Order Paper and proceed from the stage they had reached prior to the lapse by resolution of Parliament. As honourable Members will recall, Parliament is vested with the authority to enact laws for the State under Section 46 of the Constitution.

This legislative process requires Bills to be passed by Parliament and subsequently assented to by His Excellency the president, to ensure that Parliament is able to carry out or resume the necessary procedures as outlined in both the Constitution and Standing Orders. It is essential that Parliament votes on the reinstatement of the lapsed Bills, as listed out. Upon the reinstatement of the 14 lapsed Bills as identified, the relevant Standing Committees will be able to promptly continue their work from the point at which they had ceased at Prorogation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I therefore seek the full support of the honourable Members for the motion before this House, as it is imperative for Parliament and its Standing Committees to fulfil their constitutional mandate and representative responsibilities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I emphasise that this is purely a procedural motion intended to facilitate the reinstatement and restoration of the 14 lapsed Bills to the Order Paper.

I wholeheartedly commend this motion to Parliament and respectfully urge all honourable Members to extend their full support for its approval. This motion is critical to enabling Parliament and its Standing Committees to effectively carry out the legislative, representative oversight and scrutiny functions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to address this esteemed Parliament on the motion.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members for their support.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS.

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

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

- (1) Office of the Prime Minister and Fijian Immigration Department – Annual Report 2022 – 2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 133 of 2026*).
- (2) Electoral Commission – Annual Report 2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 15 of 2026*)
- (3) Electoral Commission – Annual Report 2024 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 16 of 2026*)
- (4) Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Annual Report 2021-2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 169 of 2025*)

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

- (1) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji – 2024 Financial Statements of Government (*Parliamentary Paper No. 117 of 2025*)
- (2) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji – Remaining 2024 Audit Report Social Services Sector and Economic Sector (*Parliament Paper No. 131 of 2025*)

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

- (1) Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission – 2023-2024 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 137 of 2025*)
- (2) Fiji Revenue and Customs Service – 2023-2024 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 161 of 2025*)
- (3) Assets Fiji Pte Limited – Annual Report 2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 78 of 2023*)
- (4) Assets Fiji Pte Limited – Annual Report 2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 79 of 2023*)
- (5) Assets Fiji Pte Limited – Annual Report 2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 80 of 2023*)
- (6) Fiji Sugar Corporation – Annual Report 2025 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 122 of 2025*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

- (1) Consumer Council of Fiji – Annual Report 2023-2024 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 95 of 2025*)
- (2) Fiji Airways – Annual Report 2024 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 4 of 2026*)

- (3) Department of Information and National Archives – Annual Report 2023-2024 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 3 of 2026*)
- (4) Fiji Airports – Annual Reports 2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 67 of 2025*)
- (5) Ministry of Housing and Community Development – Annual Report 2019-2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 106 of 2025*)
- (6) Ministry of Housing and Community Development – Annual Report 2020-2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 14 of 2026*)
- (7) Ministry of Local Government Annual Report – Annual Report 2019-2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 14 of 2026*)
- (8) Labasa Town Council – Annual Report 2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 152 of 2025*)
- (9) Labasa Town Council – Annual Report 2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 153 of 2025*)
- (10) Labasa Town Council – Annual Report 2020-2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 154 of 2025*)

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

- (1) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2008 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 18 of 2024*)
- (2) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Report 2009 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 19 of 2024*)
- (3) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2010 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 20 of 2024*)
- (4) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2011 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 21 of 2024*)
- (5) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2012 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 63 of 2024*)
- (6) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2013 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 64 of 2024*)
- (7) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2014 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 65 of 2024*)
- (8) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2015 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 136 of 2024*)
- (9) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 137 of 2024*)
- (10) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2017 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 138 of 2024*)
- (11) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 139 of 2024*)
- (12) Food Processors Fiji Limited – Annual Reports 2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 140 of 2024*)

Honourable Members, please take note that the following reports are for information only. I will not refer them to any of the Standing Committees.

- (1) Reserve Bank of Fiji Quarterly Economic Review December of 2025.
- (2) Medium-Term Fiscal Strategy for the Financial Year 2026 to 2029.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there will be eight Committee Reports for tabling this morning.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the Agreement to Establish the Pacific Resilience Facility

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Review Report on the Agreement to Establish the Pacific Resilience Facility.

Sir, the Pacific Island countries continue to face increasing challenges from climate change and natural disasters. Rising sea levels, stronger tropical cyclones, coastal erosion and flooding have profound impacts on communities, infrastructure, livelihoods and national economies across the

region. These challenges are particularly significant for small island developing states such as Fiji, where the effects of climate change and disasters can quickly reverse development gains and place additional pressure on public resources.

The establishment of the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) represents an important regional initiative developed by Pacific Island countries to strengthen collective resilience. The Facility is designed as a Pacific-owned and Pacific-led financing mechanism that will provide simplified and accessible grant-based funding for climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and community resilience initiatives.

In reviewing the Agreement, the Committee received submissions from government ministries, regional institutions and private sector, and civil society organisations. The discussions highlighted the importance of improving access to predictable climate disaster and disaster financing, particularly for community-level resilience initiatives that often struggle to access existing global funding mechanisms.

The Committee observed strong support among stakeholders for Fiji's participation in the facility, and the ratification of the Agreement would enable Fiji to actively participate in the governance of the PRF, contribute to shaping its policy direction, and access predictable grant-based financing aligned with national development priorities. The Facility's grant-based model, complemented by its dedicated investment arm, offers a practical mechanism for translating national climate and disaster-resilience policies into tangible, community-based initiatives. Therefore, Sir, the Committee strongly recommends that Parliament approves the ratification of the Agreement to Establish the Pacific Resilience Facility.

I wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions of all the stakeholders who participated in the Committee's consultations. Their insights have greatly assisted the Committee in examining the potential benefits, implementation considerations, and broader development implications of the Agreement. I also extend my appreciation to the Members of the Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Review Report on the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue 1979

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee's Review Report on the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue 1979.

The Convention, adopted under the auspices of the International Maritime Organization, establishes a coordinated international system for responding to maritime distress incidents, and ensuring that persons in danger at sea receive assistance without discrimination. For a maritime nation such as Fiji, with a vast ocean area and increasing maritime activity, the strengthening of search and rescue capabilities remains critical to safeguarding human life and maintaining maritime safety.

During our consultation, Sir, the Committee engaged with a broad range of stakeholders, including Government Ministries, operational agencies, and aviation and maritime authorities involved in search and rescue operations.

The Committee also undertook site visits to key operational centres to better understand the coordination and response mechanisms currently in place. These engagements provided valuable insights into the existing institutional arrangements, operational strengths, and areas requiring further development.

Information presented to the Committee, Sir, indicates that Fiji already conducts search and rescue operations through a multi-agency framework involving the Republic of Fiji Navy, the Fiji Police Force, the National Fire Authority, and aviation authorities.

However, Fiji acceding to the Convention will provide a clear and internationally recognised legal framework to strengthen coordination, enhance regional cooperation, and support the continued development of Fiji's national search and rescue system, including the enactment of dedicated search and rescue legislation.

The Committee also identified several areas that require further strengthening, including sustained investment in training, improved communication infrastructure, and enhanced interagency coordination. The recommendations contained in this Report seek to support the effective implementation of the Convention and strengthen Fiji's overall search and rescue capability.

Considering the evidence received and the analysis undertaken, the Committee strongly supports Fiji's accession to the Convention.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions of all the stakeholders, who participated very gladly and very willingly in the consultations, and provided fantastic submissions during the review process. Their expertise and cooperation assisted the Committee in undertaking this very important work.

I also extend my appreciation to Members of the Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report, and I submit this Report to Parliament, Sir.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

As for your information, the Committee, like in the previous Report, has reported back on the Treaty and, therefore, it is now the prerogative of the Acting Attorney-General to give notice that he wishes to move a motion for the Treaty to be approved by Parliament under Standing Order 134.

Consolidated Review Report –
Ministry of i-Taukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts 2022-2023 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Review Report on the 2022-2023 Ministry of i-Taukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts' Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report reflects the Committee's deliberations and key observations arising from the public hearing held on 12th November, 2025. Our analysis identified critical areas

requiring attention, including financial sustainability, digital transformation, cultural heritage preservation and governance reforms.

The Committee noted that revenue from the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB) registrations and Board fees remains minimal, resulting in heavy reliance on Government allocation. While commendable progress has been made in digitising the VKB records and expanding registration to oversee communities, challenges persist in mobilising participation and ensuring secure digital access. Similarly, the preservation of manual records and the rehabilitation of heritage sites, such as Levuka, demand urgent and sustained investment.

Policy reforms, including the re-establishment of the Great Council of Chiefs and the introduction of the Fiji National Cultural Policy, mark significant milestones. However, effective implementation will require adequate resourcing and stakeholder engagement.

The Committee also acknowledges efforts to strengthen leadership capacity, promote gender equality, and align initiatives with Sustainable Development Goals.

Nevertheless, the gap remains in performance reporting, customary title resolution and rural development strategies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of these findings, the Committee has formulated targeted recommendations aimed at:

- enhancing financial autonomy;
- accelerating digital transformation;
- safeguarding cultural heritage;
- improving governance, and
- transparency.

These recommendations underscore the need for innovative funding mechanisms, robust digital infrastructure and integrated approaches to rural development and cultural preservation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee trusts that these insights will guide the Ministry in addressing current challenges and advancing its mandate to protect and promote iTaukei heritage, governance, and socio-economic development. The Committee supports initiatives that will uphold the cultural identity and wellbeing of iTaukei communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me take this opportunity to thank the Permanent Secretary and management of the Ministry for their services and contributions to this review process.

I also thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs: honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Aliko Bia, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Parveen Bala, and the Secretariat 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order (121)(5), I hereby move:

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Ministry of Housing and Community Development 2018-2019 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Standing Committees on Social Affairs' Review Report on the 2018–2019 Ministry of Housing and Community Development Annual Report. As mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee considers issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

As part of the scrutiny process, the Committee received written responses from the Ministry of Housing and Community Development, together with additional information during the site visit. The process has been an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agency under review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's administrative history reflects consolidation, expansion, modernisation, and realignment of various achievements, including the integration of housing programmes, expansion of home ownership, formalisation of informal settlements and strengthening partnerships with stakeholders.

The modernisation of rural housing development has sharpened focus on urban housing and settlement upgrading. The Ministry has evolved into a robust institution, delivering accessible, affordable and sustainable housing solutions, in alignment with Fiji's National Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, 1,500 households were assisted through the First Home Ownership Initiative, and leases were secured for 48 informal settlements, while Government continued to provide subsidies towards Public Rental Board and HART, which supported vulnerable families.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Housing and Community Development expanded its housing assistance to fire victims, which was extended to rural and maritime areas, while disability housing assistance continued through direct Government funding. The Koroipita Model Town Project received core funding from the Fiji Government, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Rotary Club of Fiji.

The following were some of the major highlights of the Ministry's activities for the year 2018 to 2019, the:

- (1) First Home Ownership Initiative was expanded to households earning \$50,000 to \$100,000.
- (2) First Land Purchase Programme targeted households earning \$50,000 and below.
- (3) Debt relief assistance was introduced through the Housing Authority of Fiji, hence, eight households were assisted with a total sum of \$150,992.

- (4) Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme was strengthened with surveys, Environmental Impact Assessment and engineering plans, hence, \$3.2 million was spent on squatter upgrading and resettlement.
- (5) Rural Housing Assistance Programme assisted households earning \$15,000 or below, with material cost for housing.
- (6) Public Rental Board received \$1.3 million grant to assist 1,186 tenants with rental and social cost subsidies under the Public Rental Housing Subsidies Programme.
- (7) To support the vulnerable families, the Ministry provided \$311,250 for the reconstruction and maintenance of the HART Village.
- (8) Ministry assisted 27 families affected by accidental fire, with a total payment of \$135,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I sincerely thank the Permanent Secretary for Housing and Community Development and Officials for their services and contributions to this review process, and I commend the implementation of our recommendations.

I am thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for their invaluable contribution 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

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

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report – National Fire Authority 2017 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the 2017 National Fire Authority Annual Report. As mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee considers issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

As part of the scrutiny process, the Committee received a written response from the National Fire Authority (NFA), together with additional information during the site visit exercise. The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agency under review.

The NFA continues to play a pivotal role in providing fire emergency services to the people of Fiji. The commissioning of new Fire Stations in Korolevu, Korovou, Seaqaqa, Savusavu and Taveuni during the period under review confirms the NFA's ability to expand its services to the rural

community. Furthermore, NFA had procured land in Keiyasi, Pacific Harbour, Navakai, Korovisilou, Levuka and Tavua, to increase its vital services to people in the rural areas.

The Committee noted that as of 31st July, 2017, NFA had 18 Fire Stations and 78 vehicles around Fiji, with a total staff of 394. Despite facing the challenges in utilising a limited budget, maintaining the high cost of ageing vehicles and procuring of expensive firefighting equipment from abroad, the Committee acknowledged the hard work carried out by the firefighters in protecting the properties and lives of the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the legislative reform, the Committee commended NFA's efforts to expand its services beyond its mandated boundaries.

To conclude, I sincerely thank the Chief Executive Officer of the NFA and Officials for their services and contributions to the review process and commend the implementation of our recommendations.

I also thank all the honourable Members for their invaluable 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.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - iTaukei Land Trust Board 2023 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the 2023 iTaukei Land Trust Board Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee proudly acknowledged and appreciated that this is the first ever TLTB Annual Report independently tabled in Parliament, presented on 14th March, 2025. Important milestone for transparency, accountability and strengthening the Parliamentary oversight of iTaukei land management.

Throughout our review, the Committee noted several critical areas that warrant national attention. Rent arrears continue to be a significant challenge, with a starting arrears balance of \$27.75 million for the 2023-2024 period, particularly concentrated in residential and agricultural leases. This undermines the financial returns to landowners and places pressure on iTLTB's operational capacity. The Committee encouraged the Board to strengthen its arrears recovery mechanism through structured repayment options, digital reminders and incentive schemes for early settlement.

The Committee also examined the status of over 40 development leases under the Ministry of Housing, where prolonged delays have resulted in landowner dissatisfaction, and a growing reluctance to renew development leases. Only two projects at Ledrusasa and Waidamudamu have reached completion. Effective land development is essential for *iTaukei* socio-economic progress and we, therefore, recommend the establishment of a joint iTLTB housing monitoring mechanism to improve delivery and ensure accountability.

A further concern related to the misalignment between the iTaukei Land Trust Act and the Agricultural Landlord Tenants Act (ALTA). ALTA's regulated rent system differs fundamentally from iTLTB's open market rental framework, resulting in policy fragmentation and operational challenges. The Committee supports a holistic legislative review and the formulation of an Inter-Ministerial Land Policy Alignment Taskforce to ensure long-term policy coherence.

The Committee acknowledges iTLTB's proactive engagement regarding the more than 1,000 sugarcane leases set to expire by 2030. Early consultations with tenants and landowners are commendable, as they enable informed decision-making, whether for renewal, partial renewal, or conversion to higher value uses. Such forward planning is essential to sustain both the agricultural sector and landowner interests.

We commend iTLTB for its ongoing digital transformation, including online systems for lease processing, rent assessments and conveyancing. These advancements, supported by national recognition, such as the President's Award, significantly improve accessibility and service delivery, particularly for rural landowners who may benefit from the expanded mobile-friendly platforms.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend our sincere appreciation to iTLTB, the Government Ministries, landowners, and stakeholders for their cooperation throughout this review process. As the first independently prepared iTLTB Annual Report submitted to Parliament, this moment represents a significant step towards greater transparency, accountability, and a collaborative progress.

Finally, I thank the honourable Members of the Committee for their invaluable input and support during the process. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question out.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Audit on Provincial Councils (Volume 7)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to present the Review Report on the Audit of Provincial Councils (Volume 7).

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to present this Report on the Audit of the Provincial Councils, based on the findings of the Auditor-General issued under Regulation 33 of the iTaukei Affairs (Provincial Councils) Regulations 1996.

This Report consolidates the financial years from 2017 to 2022 and represents a significant step forward in addressing the longstanding backlog of financial reporting within the provincial administration system.

To date, the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) has received 275 draft financial statements from Provincial Councils, of which 259, representing 94 percent have already been audited and reported across Volumes 1 to 6 of these Reports.

Volume 7, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is being tabled today, captures the most recent progress, comprising 32 financial statements: eight statements from four Provincial Councils for 2017-2018 financial years, and a further 24 statements from six Councils for 2019-2022.

While this progress is commendable, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 56 financial statements for seven Councils remain outstanding for the financial years 2019-2022. In addition, all 14 Provincial Councils are expected to be audited for the years 2023-2024 during the 2025-2026 financial years, contingent upon the timely submission of draft financial statements.

I do congratulate the iTaukei Affairs Board and the OAG for their concerted efforts in bringing the majority of reporting obligations up to date. Despite this positive momentum, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the audits continue to reveal recurring deficiencies that require urgent and sustained attention.

Notable issues include significant delays in the submission of draft financial statements, persistent non-compliance with International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS), which is a standard for small and medium enterprises, and limitations in audit scope resulting from inadequate or missing documentation. Weaknesses in records management were common, with several Councils unable to substantiate balances due to missing financial or operational records.

Controls over staff advances and investment records also remain insufficient. Many advances were poorly documented or inadequately monitored, resulting in substantial audit adjustments. Records of investments held with Provincial Holding Companies or other entities were often outdated or unavailable, preventing confirmation of investment holdings, and affecting the reliability of reported financial positions. Errors in the preparation and review of draft financial statements further highlight gaps in internal controls and review processes within Councils.

The Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, visited six Provincial Councils in Ba, Bua, Ra, Naitasiri, Lau and Rewa, and acknowledges their commitment to improving financial management and reporting. However, the Committee noted that some Councils maintained that their records were up to date, despite findings indicating otherwise. In light of this, going forward, the Committee recommends that future audits be conducted directly at the Provincial Council headquarters, to ensure that issues relating to records, controls and documentation are properly addressed at source.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Ba, Bua, Ra, Naitasiri, Lau and Rewa Provincial Councils in their work to address the issues highlighted in Volume 7. Many Councils have transitioned to using an accounting information system called SAGE and have also adopted a new Human Resource Information System, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for payroll and leave management. However, there are challenges with internet connectivity, which hinders the effective use of these systems.

The Committee also observed that several Councils are actively strengthening their internal controls, improving record-keeping practices, and developing strategic plans to guide their operations over the next three to five years. To sustain and build on this momentum, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee strongly recommends the establishment of an Inter-Ministry and Agency Taskforce, supported by adequate budgetary resources, to oversee and coordinate the necessary reforms.

The Committee urges the iTaukei Affairs Board and all Provincial Councils to prioritise corrective actions to commit fully to achieving credible, transparent and timely financial reporting. Strengthened governance and financial accountability are essential to ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of Provincial Council operations.

Mr. Speaker, I digress slightly just to mention that in discussing with the iTaukei Affairs Board, I told him about the following in vernacular:

“Oqo na keda i rairai na i Taukei. Kevaka e sega ni vinaka na noda maroroya na ka me baleta na i tukutuku vakailavo ni Valenivolavola ni Yasana, ena sega ni vinaka na keda i rairai.”

[Our reputation as iTaukei people is at stake. If we do not properly safeguard the financial records of Provincial Offices, our image will not look good.]

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is why we are requesting that adequate resources be given over the next few years, to complete these necessary reforms.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I extend my appreciation to the Chief Financial Officer of the iTaukei Affairs Board for the ongoing work she has committed, to strengthen the systems and processes across the Councils, and to the OAG for its efforts in clearing audit backlogs and providing essential technical guidance.

I also acknowledge the dedication and contributions of the honourable Members of this Committee - honourable Jovesa Vocea, Deputy Chairperson; honourable Naisa Tuinaceva; honourable Sachida Nand, honourable Alvick Maharaj and honourable Hem Chand in the compilation of this bipartisan Report.

I hereby commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General.)

HON. M.S.N .KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order (121) (5), I hereby move:

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

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable members, I intend to take an early lunch break today for lunch before midday. We will resume at an earlier time at 2.00 p.m., but before that, I will entertain a suspension motion from the Leader of the Government in Parliament.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23 (1), is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 12.30 p.m. today, to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to earlier, we need more time to complete the Committee Reports and Bills.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate.

If any Member wishes to speak on the Motion, otherwise, I will call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we suspend our proceedings, I would like to remind the House Committee that we have a meeting immediately after this at the Small Committee Room, and the honourable Deputy Speaker will Chair that meeting.

Honourable Members, we will suspend our proceedings for lunch, and Parliament will resume at 2.00 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.55 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.05 p.m.

Consolidated Review Report - Fiji Rice Limited 2018-2023 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I am pleased to present the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Rice Limited 2018-2023 Annual Reports.

Fiji Rice Limited is important to Fiji because it strengthens national food security by producing locally grown rice, provides a guaranteed market and stable income for farmers, supports rural communities through milling, and helps reduce reliance on imported rice.

The company also partners with the Government through the disbursement of subsidies, mechanisation and climate-resilient initiatives, making it a key contributor to Fiji's economic stability and long-term agricultural development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji remains heavily dependent on imported rice, bringing in approximately 52,000 metric tonnes annually, valued at around FJD63 million, due to limited domestic production capacity and national self-sufficiency rate of only 20 percent. In 2022, local production reached just 10,000 tonnes, underscoring the substantial supply gap that must be met through imports.

The 2022-2023 Annual Report highlights this dependency as a challenge, emphasising the urgent need to expand local production and reduce the FJD63 million import bill through targeted Government support and sector reforms.

To gather more information regarding Fiji Rice Limited's 2018-2023 Annual Reports, the Committee undertook a visit to the Northern Division, from 3rd to 5th March, 2026. The Committee engaged directly with Fiji Rice, the Ministry of Agriculture, and farmers in Bua, Macuata and Cakaudrove. As Fiji Rice Limited remains responsible solely for milling, these on-the-ground observations provided invaluable insight into the broader environment in which operations function, and the challenges affecting the entire rice value-chain.

The site visit confirmed that Fiji Rice Limited continues to operate under a significant financial constraint. The company is currently insolvent and relies heavily on Government grants and subsidies.

The Committee also observed the pressing need for investment and modernisation. Fiji Rice's ageing mill and drying facilities require upgrading to improve output quality, reduce operational losses, and support national food security objectives.

Throughout the Northern Division, the Committee noted gaps in data collection and information sharing between Fiji Rice Limited and the Ministry of Agriculture. Strengthening these systems would enable more accurate production forecasts and informed decision-making at both, operational and at policy levels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another key finding from the site visit was the large amount of arable land that remains underutilised. Many farmers expressed their challenges in accessing suitable land through formal tenancy agreement with the iTaukei Land Trust Board, as most farmers are currently accessing land through informal arrangements. This highlights the need for improved land allocation processes and support mechanisms. Of course, farmer training is also an important priority.

The Committee further recognised the potential to grow demand for locally produced rice,

particularly brown rice, which offers significant health benefits and supports national efforts to combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Promotion of local rice through the Government procurement process and institution will not only improve public health outcomes but also reduce Fiji's reliance on imported rice.

I would like to thank the staff of Fiji Rice, the Deputy Secretary and Extension staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, for their cooperation throughout the review process. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of my fellow Committee Members: honourable Premila Kumar, honourable Semi Koroilavesau, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Kalaveti Ravu and honourable Shalen Kumar, in the compilation of this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I present this Review Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august House to take note of the findings in the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please note that there will be three Bills for Consideration today. The first one will be for the First Reading, and the second and third Bills will be for their Third Reading.

PUBLIC HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL 2026

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 84, I move:

That the Public Health (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Bill No. 04/2026), be now read for the first time.

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

(Copies of the Bill handed to the Secretary-General)

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

Honourable Members, given that the Second Reading of the Bill will be scheduled for a future sitting of Parliament, I encourage all honourable Members to study and examine the Bill and prepare accordingly, noting that the Second Reading debate will be premised on the principles and merits of the Bill.

Honourable Members, we will now deal with the Second Reading of the second Bill for today. I remind honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 11th March 2026, the debate on the Bill will be limited to one hour.

HIGHER SALARIES COMMISSION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2026

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 11th March, 2026, I move:

That the Higher Salaries Commission (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Bill No. 02/2026) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Colleagues on this side of the House and the other side of the House; I am deeply honoured and privileged to stand in this august House as I rise to speak on the Higher Salaries Commission (Amendment) Bill 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of this Bill is to amend Schedule 1 of the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2023, to include eight additional Government bodies under the oversight of the Higher Salaries Commission, bringing the total of entities to cover 35.

The Higher Salaries Commission plays an important role in the public sector governance framework by providing an independent mechanism responsible for determining the remuneration of Chief Executive Officers, and other equivalent executive positions within the specified Government entities. This framework assists in ensuring that executive remuneration is assessed through a structured and impartial process, guided by clear oversight arrangements.

Honourable Members will recall that the Higher Salaries Commission was abolished in 2011, following the enactment of the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2011. Under that arrangement, the responsibility of determining the executive remuneration was delegated to various Ministers, Boards and Authorities. While this approach provided a degree of administrative flexibility, it also resulted in a fragmented process across the different Government bodies. The absence of a central oversight mechanism created inconsistency in the manner in which executive remuneration was determined for these bodies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recognition of these concerns, the Government re-established the Higher Salaries Commission in 2023 through the enactment of the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2023, restoring an independent and centralised framework responsible for determining the salaries and benefits of the Chief Executive Officers and equivalent positions for the bodies prescribed in the Act.

Currently, 27 Government bodies are listed under Schedule I of the Act. This includes a number of key strategic Authorities and Government-controlled companies that play important roles in the delivery of essential services and support the key sectors of the national economy. Government institutions continue to evolve, and it is important that the legislative framework supporting the Commission is critically reviewed to ensure that it remains effective and relevant.

Following a review undertaken by the Ministry of Public Enterprises in 2024, it was noted that several Government-controlled entities are currently not included in Schedule I of the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2023. In the absence of the Commission's oversight, remuneration of Chief Executive Officers or similar type of positions in these entities, is presently determined through

varying intangible arrangements.

In some instances, these decisions are made by respective Boards, while in other cases they are undertaken through consultation with relevant Ministries. While such arrangements may have been established through their respective governing legislations, these Government bodies do not provide the same level of independent oversight that the Higher Salaries Commission framework was designed to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in January this year, the Cabinet endorsed amendments to Schedule I of the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2023, to include eight additional Government bodies. These entities are:

- (1) Assets Fiji Private Limited;
- (2) Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission;
- (3) Fiji Investment Corporation Limited;
- (4) Fiji Roads Authority;
- (5) Investment Fiji;
- (6) Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji;
- (7) Oceania Shipbuilding Engineering Private Limited; and
- (8) Public Rental Board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the inclusion of these entities under the scope of Higher Salaries Commission will ensure that the remunerations of the executive positions he has assessed under the same institutional framework that currently applies to other government-controlled bodies. This will promote greater transparency, fairness, consistency in the remuneration package. It is also important to recognise that a number of these organisations operate with financial support from the Government or rely on the public resources to carry out their statutory functions.

Given this connection to public funds, it is both appropriate and prudent that the remuneration of the most senior executives be subjected to the same independent oversight mechanism that applies to other government bodies already listed under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me now to briefly highlight the salient provision of this Bill. Firstly, the Bill amends Schedule 1 of the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2023 to formally incorporate the eight additional government entities that I have just outlined. Secondly, the Act allows Schedule 1 to be amended through a notice in Gazette.

The inclusion of these certain entities requires consequential amendments to the respective governing legislations, so the authority to determine the remuneration of the Chief Executive Officers rests with the Higher Salaries Commission. The proposed Bill, therefore, makes consequential amendments to the following Acts:

- (1) Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Act 2010;
- (2) Fiji Roads Authority Act 2012;
- (3) Investment Fiji Act 2022; and
- (4) Maritime Safety Authority Act 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these consequential amendments will ensure that the relevant legislative frameworks are properly aligned with the provisions of the Higher Salaries Commission Act.

It is important to emphasise that these amendments do not interfere with the operational

independence of this organisation. Better, they strengthen the governance arrangement by ensuring that executive remuneration decisions are guided by the independent constitutional process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, this amendment would modernize originaive landscape, aligning critical status and reinforce the coherent system of the oversight without compromising the operational independence of the organisation concerned. Ultimately this Bill enhances our public sector governance and supports the effective delivery of service to our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those remarks I commend the Higher Salaries Commission (Amendment)) Bill 2026 to this august House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers, please note each speaker is allocated 5 minutes for his or her intervention.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for explaining the main merits of the Bill before the House.

I wish to make a short contribution and raise some issues that I believe must be noted. I will outline what I see as the effects of this Bill and then look at some consequences – positive and negatives - and highlight them accordingly.

Before I carry on, I would like to ask the honourable Minister because there seems to be a new company that is owned by government - Oceania Shipbuilding and Engineering Pte Limited. I have never heard of this company, and I would like, in your reply, if you can just explain the business being run by this company.

The honourable Minister has outlined the basic merits, and the explanation has been very, very clear. I think one of the issues that I wanted to raise is the consequential to the other companies that are already existing and this, he has outlined, are the four companies - Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission, Fiji Roads Authority, Investment Fiji and Maritime Safety Authority.

I think the critical issue here is that, these are technical fields, and although the CEOs will be, because they are technical officers, they will be appointed by the board or the overarching authority that looks after them, the CEO is appointed by them, but their salary and conditions will still be dictated by the Higher Salaries Commission.

While these entities can appoint the CEO, the salary, as I have said, the benefits will still be set. That is my understanding, honourable Minister, but you can correct me. I think the rationale provided by the honourable Minister sounds good and it will introduce a standardized salary determination process, it will ensure transparency and fairness and also reduce the excessive and inconsistent remuneration across government-controlled entities.

Some of the key positives that I can see is the greater transparency that will be derived from this Higher Salaries Commission, dictating the salary and conditions right across the board.

- (1) A centralised salary determination process will reduce opaque and inconsistent remuneration decisions within state-owned entities.
- (2) The consistency across the government entities. The amendment promotes uniformity in executive compensation, ensuring salaries across statutory bodies and government companies follows a consistent framework.

- (3) The reduction of risk of excessive CEO pay - independent oversight by the Higher Salaries Commission will prevent unjustified salary increases or disproportionate benefit packages.

There is a need to be aware of a few issues such as reduced autonomy of statutory bodies, the risk of over centralisation, possible talent attraction issues, and potential political influence.

Those, Mr. Speakers, are the issues that I wish to highlight to the honourable Minister, just reading through the Bill, and I just wanted to make sure that whatever the outcome of the Bill is positive for the government entities, that will be controlled by the Higher Salaries Commission.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the Fiji Higher Salaries Commission was abolished. In 2023, this Coalition Government took the deliberate decision, to restore it, and we did so, because the imperatives that existed in 1983 still also exist, urgent and valid as of today. Now, let me express why.

We need a central, independent mechanism for setting top-level public sector pay. A fragmented ad-hoc approach simply does not work in a modern economy. We require one body, one set of consistent standards, one rigorous methodology applied across chief executives and senior leaders in every major government-controlled entity, statutory body, and authorities.

The period after 2011 exposed a high cost of abolition. The system criticized rightly for its lack of commercial sophistication, its opacity, its delays, and its inconsistencies. Responsibilities fell to the Prime Minister and Ministers, the very individuals with inherent political stakes in the outcomes. Independent reviews were commissioned yet often sidelined or inconsistently applied. The result? Pay disparities, questionable value for money, and a growing perception that proximity to power, rather than merit and market realities determine the rewards.

Reinstating a dedicated professional Commission corrects these failings. It brings expertise in economics, remuneration strategy and public sector governance to bear. It levels the playing field and it builds trust. Let us be candid about what followed the 2011 abolition under the previous administration. A fragmented system emerged. Inconsistencies were multiplied and decisions shifted from principles to proximity. Critics, including many in this House, rightly pointed out that this opened the door to excess, to awards that favoured the connected, and to a steady erosion of public confidence. Examples are not hard to find, and they are also not abstract.

Some years ago, a foreign CEO at the Land Transport Authority received over half a million dollars annually over functions that, frankly, could be managed with far less complexity. Yet one of Fiji's own very outstanding contributors, Mr. Abraham Simpson, an exceptional engineer and change manager who transformed the Land Transport Authority into the effective institution it became, was compensated at roughly a fifth of that level in the mid-2000s.

We sometimes undervalue our home-grown talents simply because they are Fijian born and they are Fijian bred. Similarly, the CEO of a major broadcasting entity drew just over \$400,000 in base salary, supplemented by bonuses approaching \$250,000 over time, including a \$25,000 payment in a COVID year when many Fijians had faced hardship. As the honourable Jone Usamate always aptly puts, it is flabbergasting.

These are not isolated anecdotes. They illustrate a deeper issue – when oversight is weak, public institutions risk appearing to serve the few at the top rather than the many they exist to serve. That, Mr. Speaker, is unacceptable.

The amendment before us today extends that protection further by adding entities to Schedule 1, including key state-owned companies that my colleague, the honourable Charan Jeeth Singh had spoken about, statutory bodies and public authorities, adding for more, we ensure that the top salaries are determined independently outside the influence of the very structures that they report to - transparency, consistency and accountability. In an era where fiscal discipline, public trust and inclusive growth are non-negotiable, small island nations like ours, this is prudent governance in action.

I, therefore, urge all the honourable Members, colleagues across the aisle and indeed the entire House to join us in supporting the Amendment Bill, and let us send a very clear, unified message to Fiji. In Fiji, public money is sacred, public leadership is accountable and fairness is not negotiable.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I would like to mention this to the honourable Prime Minister that he really played smart this time by having honourable Charan Jeeth Singh as the Minister of Public Enterprises. This might be the first time in the past three years for the Opposition to be agreeing to honourable Charan Jeeth Singh. It was a very smart move to get the Opposition on his side in agreeing to this particular Bill that is before us.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had suggested that we as Opposition, we do appreciate this particular Bill coming in and we agree with the contents, as well as the rationale that is actually being given by honourable Charan Jeeth Singh as the Minister. We do agree to it. Bringing this Bill will actually bring in greater public transparency, fiscal responsibility, stronger governance and alignment of policy. We saw certain agencies brought under the Higher Salaries Commission but unfortunately there were some that were left out, however, the eight that were left out are now coming again into the picture.

Also, while we acknowledge the pros, we do need to acknowledge the cons as well. There are some agencies which are very specific so we need to be mindful, if we are bringing in experts, not bringing someone from outside, but someone from that industry, if we need expertise and if we are bringing them to CEO level, they might get attracted by a higher salary. So, something for the Higher Salaries Commission to be flexible so that we do not lose these kinds of people if we are not able to negotiate the right salary that is supposed to be paid to them. Bringing it under one centralised system, we hope that this does not create a bureaucratic delay for the organisation to proceed if they are without a leader or without a CEO, because with this kind of institute, we definitely need leaders to be up to par so that organisations are run properly and provides the service that they are intended for.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about is, while we are discussing about Higher Salaries Commission, I think the Emoluments Committee made recommendations with regards to the salaries of all the Members of Parliament. While we are doing this under transparency, I strongly believe that we as Members of Parliament should not decide on our own salary. I believe there was a recommendation that there should be an independent commission, and we need to acknowledge that as well. Any salary increase for Members of Parliament needs to go to an independent commission rather than an Emoluments Committee which consists of Members of Parliament themselves.

It is just a recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, something to consider as it was part of a Committee.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The Opposition side thinks this is a good Bill and we support the motion before the House.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for bringing up this Bill - Higher Salaries Commission Bill. A few of the entities within my Ministry are there, Land Transport Authority, Fiji Roads Authority, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji listed there. I do agree with honourable Koroilavesau in terms of the technical nature of these entities and the leadership in it; the engineers and other technical people as we can see today in terms of the skills moving out of the country. It is also necessary to look at it in that context. That was one of the issues which was discussed before this Bill came.

However, if you look at section 20, it, sort of, alleviates that. Let me just read it out, and I quote:

“Any salary or which may tend to lead to unreasonable disparities or inappropriate relativities with any salary determined by the Commission under section 16 may before agreeing or committing itself to the payment, consult with the Commission.”

The Board can still consult with the Commission on that. Referring to section 16, it clearly states there that the board must “consider and determine”. So, when you do that, normally they would look at data from market surveys. For example, in Fiji, we have the annual remuneration service by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). That could be one of the competitors and demographic and market factors, fair competition, and of course, budget availability.

As already mentioned by honourable Maharaj, these entities at some stage might not look at only the local market, but also the external labour market, such as Australia and New Zealand. So, there needs to be flexibility in that. Those two sections, sections 16 and section 20 will allow the Higher Salaries Commission to have that flexibility and consult with the board, if the board feels that the remuneration (which is there) needs to be amended to try to attract someone who qualification and experience will be needed at a particular point in time for these specific organisations.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Higher Salaries Commission (Amendment) Bill 2026, as previously presented by the honourable Minister. Good to have Bills and motions for the Minister so that he can be in the House in the afternoons.

A lot has been said, but probably I will just highlight two issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir. One is, as Government has stated their intention behind this amendment, to create a more transparent and consistent process for determining the executive remuneration across Government-controlled entities, the explanatory note further suggests that this approach will promote fairness, accountability and reduce the risk of excessive or inconsistent salary practices across the public sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are objectives that no reasonable Member of this House can oppose. Transparency, accountability and responsible use of public resources are principles that must always guide the governance of public institutions in our country. The only two key issues, Mr. Speaker, that I want to raise is, in the determination of executive remuneration on the single commission, it may indeed create a level of uniformity and oversight across Government entities.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also need to ask ourselves whether the proposed approach strikes the right balance between oversight and institutional independence. I know that Government has serious issues with retention and probably what I have always raised this before when annual reports are debated in this House, while the Commission has this responsibility, probably in terms of flexibility, if we can also be ready to provide counter-offer packages because most of our good locals

take up the jobs while waiting for better opportunities. When those opportunities do come, Government keeps losing, despite all the investments that we have made on this human capital of ours. I have highlighted previously in instances like they do in Papua New Guinea, where government has to be ready to provide counteroffers to these specialised skills, if there are offers coming from other agencies.

That brings me to my second point, Mr. Speaker, Sir. While we are talking about uniformity and consistency, we need to understand the fact that some of these entities are very technical in terms of the skills, like Fiji Roads Authority, Investment Fiji, Ocean Shipbuilding. So, we need to be sensitive to these highly specialised and commercially sensitive sectors, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so that they are given the appropriate remuneration and terms and conditions therefore. I hope that this change will not end up in executives having to experience constraint due to rigid and centralised salary structures.

To attract the best people, we also need to ensure that the remuneration packages are reasonable so that we can get the best, so that they can move the industry forward. We support the Bill.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very short with this. It is pleasing to note that this motion has received considerable support from the honourable Members of this august House, together with a number of constructive suggestions and thoughtful recommendations. Such contributions reflect the collective commitment of this House to strengthen the governance, improving accountability and ensuring the legislative framework remains responsive to the needs of our institution and the people we serve.

I wish to acknowledge and appreciate the insights shared in the deliberations as they add value to the process and help refine the intent and implementation of this important amendment. As I noted earlier, the Higher Salaries Commission (Amendment) Bill needs to be expedited in order to establish a consistent and independent mechanism, determining a fair remuneration for the executives appointed to these eight bodies, therefore, promoting greater integrity and strengthening good governance in the process.

In conclusion, I call on the honourable Members of this august House to support this motion. However, just before taking my seat, honourable Koroilavesau, your query about Oceania Shipbuilding and Engineering Pte Limited, a fully Government-owned company, established on 9th December, 2024, with a primary objective to operate a proposed new shipbuilding facility. The company is currently not performing any activities, does not have staff, but has been established to implement the shipbuilding project upon completion of the study.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Higher Salaries Commission Act 2023 (Bill No. 2 of 2026) and for related matters moved under Standing Order 51 enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No. of 2026)]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now deal with the third and final Bill for today. I remind honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 12th March, 2026, the debate on the Bill will be limited to one hour.

Before I call on the honourable Prime Minister, just to alert honourable Members that it is the intention of the Chair to suspend our proceedings before 3.30 p.m. So, we will go as far as we can with the debate on the Bill until then before I suspend the proceedings, if necessary.

FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2026

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 12th March, 2026, I move:

That the Fiji National University (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Bill No. 03/2026), be debated, voted upon, and do pass.

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

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support and commend this Bill, the Fiji National University (Amendment) Bill 2026's Third Reading, which I presented yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill reflects the Coalition Government's strong commitment to repositioning the Fiji National University (FNU), as a dynamic and innovative tertiary education institution that responds effectively to the skills requirement of all sectors of our economy, in an environment shaped by increased labour mobility across borders and Government's vision, in pursuit of modernity and a high income nation by 2050. I commend the Ministry of Education, the Minister for Education and staff, for providing the much-needed direction to the University during its formative years, particularly, as a dual pathway University in the Pacific.

As a nation, we are defined by our uniqueness, a nation diverse in our cultures and tradition. A nation that has shown exceptional resilience - our National University too has withstood many challenges. It is now positioned to take its unique position in the world of higher education and learning.

As a nation, we must now develop our workforce to respond to these global challenges, customize our workforce to the specific needs of our industries and firms, and prepare our people for nation building and the opportunities that are ahead of us. With these programmes, we have delivered skills for our private and public sectors in yesteryears, we have also witnessed an increasing movement of our skilled and trained labour abroad, in search of new employment opportunities.

As a nation, we cannot stop labour mobility. We have been benefiting from remittances sent by our people working overseas. There is an increase in our diaspora returning and investing here in Fiji. This has brought about skills shortages in key industries which affected their productivity and constrained our nation's growth potential in the past three years.

Government has had to act instantaneously. We have made changes to our immigration work permit system and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our National University is the pride of our nation. It requires our nation's full attention and government support. The University's operations are fully funded by our taxpayers. The University has a unique, multisectoral character in terms of five Colleges and the Programmes they each offer.

To align FNU's mandate, functions and power to the Whole of Government National Development Plan 2025-2026 and Vision 2050, the key development priorities. Sir, FNU is Fiji's flagship, dual sector tertiary institution, and it supports government's national human capital and skills pipeline across multiple sectors, including the National Strategic Human Resource Plan and FNU is connected to different Ministries of the Fiji Public Service and is expected to partner with

the Government to support national development outcomes and priorities.

These Colleges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are the alignment to sectoral ministries are as follows:

- (1) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences - Ministry responsible for Health and Medical Services.
- (2) College of Humanities, Education and Law - Ministry responsible for Education, Teacher Education, cross engagement with the Ministry responsible for Justice, Legal Affairs, Social Services, Home Affairs, Cultures and Languages, as well as Women and Climate Change and Environment.
- (3) College of Business and Hotel and Tourism Studies - Ministry responsible for Tourism, Trade, Commerce, MSME Development, Hospitality and Border Control and the Fiji Learning Institute for Public Service.
- (4) College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Ministry is responsible for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.
- (5) College of Engineering and Technical Vocational Training previously as College of Engineering, Science and Technology - Ministry responsible for Infrastructure, Public Works, Transport, Energy.
- (6) National Training and Productivity Centre – Ministry responsible Employment, Productivity and Work Relations.
- (7) Pacific Centre for Maritime and Marine Studies (previously the Fiji Maritime Academy) – Ministry responsible for Maritime, Transport and Shipping.
- (8) Pacific Centre of Aviation Studies in Nadi – Ministry responsible for Civil Aviation.

I believe that as a nation, we must increase our investment in our human capital, resources and relevant skills by aligning Fiji National University and its programmes to specific sector needs, increase our productivity levels, grow our economy and let the market forces determine terms, conditions and rewards for assistance in our labour market.

It is now time to set a new course for our nation's Fiji National University, a course that positions the FNU to achieve high quality research, high level of learning and teaching and relevancy of the curriculum offerings to the needs of our domestic industries and investors, including the adoption of new technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Sir, FNU shall be specifically tailored to make skills that can substantially transform our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have a list of speakers, each one of you will have five minutes each.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate before the House. The issues engulfing FNU is becoming a national embarrassment. It goes to expose our systemic breakdown of governance, accountability and respect for the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, something in the air is not right. Something is happening to FNU, and the Parliament is being masked to pretend it is normal. For three years now, we have watched a pattern unfold, a slow weakening of Fiji National University, a national institution that once trained our nurses, teachers, engineers and farmers is now reduced, sidelined and pushed to the shadows.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.N. NAND.- Funding cuts, programmes discontinued, campuses shrinking, staff uncertain and students confused. Mr. Speaker, Sir, now we are told, do not worry, it is just a small amendment, just a technical change, just moving FNU to another Ministry. When we step back and look at the bigger picture, the pattern becomes impossible to ignore. While FNU has been weakened, another institution has been rising rapidly and aggressively with extraordinary Government support. A relatively new institution has received millions in the last three budgets. A provider that has been elevated while FNU has been quietly pushed aside.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one does not need to be a detective to see that these two stories are connected. You weaken the National University, starve it of resources, remove its technical programmes, shift it out of the Ministry of Education and then you tell the country that another institution will fill the gap.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not lie!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You made it expensive!

HON. J.N. NAND.- The Bill is not about the definition. It is about a direction, a direction that has never been explained to the public, a direction that has never been justified with evidence, a direction that raises more questions than answers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, something is fishy, something is not adding up and the people of Fiji deserve transparency. This Parliament cannot allow our National University to be quietly restructured through the back door. We cannot allow public institutions to be weakened while our private institutions are strengthened. We cannot allow the future of our young, once shaped by decisions that are hidden behind technical amendments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU belongs to the people of Fiji. It is a public asset, a national institution and any changes to its governance, direction or purpose must be debated openly, honestly and fully. This Bill does not give us that. This Bill hides more than it reveals and is a symptom of a much larger shift; a shift that the Government has refused to explain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, until this House receives a full, transparent, evidence-based justification for the weakening of FNU and the rise of some other institutions, we cannot support these amendments. The people of Fiji deserve answers and today we stand to demand them.

I strongly oppose this Bill, and this Government must stop hoodwinking the people of Fiji.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the Fiji National University (Amendment) Bill 2026, because the Bill is not simply about the University, it is about the future of our people and the future of our nation. I agree with honourable Nand that a nation that invests in education invests in its own future.

However, hearing from him of a generalisation as if there is some mischief, bad faith on the part of Government. Let me just make this clear. I have here a Bill, there is only one section that is being amended and it reads, and I quote:

“Section 3 of the Fiji National University Act 2009 is amended in the definition of Minister by deleting tertiary education in the Republic of Fiji and substituting the administration in this Act.”

The ministerial responsibility on the other page says that the Act comes under the responsibility of

the Minister responsible for the administration of this Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ministerial alignment of the Fiji National University to any Minister is not new. If you look globally, the Prime Minister has also held this responsibility in another jurisdictions. Apart from our university, the Prime Minister is responsible for that in Malaysia, University of Tokyo in Japan, University of Indonesia, Academy of Police and Development in Vietnam, and National Institute of Governance and Sustainable Development in Egypt, and of course, the regional University in China.

At the National University of Singapore, the Prime Minister appoints the Chancellor. The ministerial alignment of the Fiji National University to the Office of the Prime Minister, or any other Minister for that matter, is a reflection of government's deeper commitment to education as a national priority. This realignment sends a strong message to the people of Fiji.

Education is not the responsibility of one ministry alone; it is the responsibility of the entire nation. It reflects the whole of government approach to strengthening our education system and ensuring that institutions such as FNU are fully supported to deliver quality education and training. This approach also aligns closely with the priorities set in the National Development Plan 2025 to 2029 and Vision 2050 which emphasises the inclusive development, national unity and empowerment of our people.

At the centre of this national framework is a simple but powerful principle - investing in people. This element also strengthens the collaboration between the university and the government ministry and of course, the private sector. Through stronger partnership, we can ensure a more balanced and holistic approach to education, continuous improvement in education programmes so they remain aligned with industry needs, greater employment opportunities for graduates, and stronger institutional support for the university as it continues to grow and innovate.

The Fiji National University plays a critical role in this national vision. Through its dual sector education model, the University provides both higher education and technical and vocational training. This ensures that our students graduate not only with academic qualifications, but also with practical skills that are directly relevant to the needs of our economy and communities. What makes this institution particularly important, its commitment to reaching rural and remote communities.

For many young people in these areas access to higher education was only a distant dream. Today, through the Fiji National University, those dreams are becoming a reality. Young Fijians from across our islands now have the opportunity to acquire skills, build careers, support their families and contribute to national progress.

The realignment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may emphasise again, strengthens the University's role as a National Centre for Research and Innovation, with close alignment with national development priorities and strong engagement with the Ministry of Strategic Planning and National Development and Statistics, research and innovation can play a greater role in shaping policies and solutions that support our national growth.

These benefits of this partnership are already evident across our country. The increase in remittances continue to support families, uplift communities and contribute significantly to our national economy. At the end of the day, the Bill is not simply about administrative changes or institutional governance, it is about opportunity. It is about ensuring that every young Fijian, regardless of where they come from has a chance to gain education skills to build a better Fiji.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Fijian National University (Amendment) Bill

2026.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, it is important that we place this Bill within its proper context. The Fiji National University Act 2009 establishes the governance structure of the university and clearly outlines the role of the Minister responsible for tertiary education in relation to the oversight of the institution.

The current legislative framework already provides the Minister responsible for tertiary education with significant influence over the governance of the University, including key appointments connected to the administration of the University and its governing bodies. The Act therefore already provides the Government of the day with the mechanisms necessary to exercise oversight of the institution through the existing education portfolio.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, sir, the amendment before this House does not alter the substantive powers provided under the Act. Instead, it seeks to change the definition of the Minister from the Minister responsible for tertiary education to the Minister responsible for the administration of the Act. In practical terms, what this amendment does is simply facilitate the transfer of administrative responsibility for the University from one ministerial portfolio to another. The question that arises is, why is this amendment necessary at this particular point in time?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the timing of this amendment raises serious concerns. It comes at a time when the Fiji National University Council itself has already reportedly lodged a complaint with the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption concerning the Vice-Chancellor of the University. This is a matter of significant public interest and institutional integrity. At a time when such serious issues are under investigation, it is deeply troubling that the Government is simultaneously seeking to alter the ministerial oversight framework governing the university.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the public will naturally question whether these developments are connected. The perception created by the timing of this amendment risks undermining public confidence in the governance of one of our most important national institutions. We must also recall that there had already been a public announcement by the Government that the Ministry responsible for Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics had taken over the oversight of Fiji National University.

However, the law as it currently stands clearly places responsibility for tertiary education institutions within the education portfolio. This means that the administrative shift had effectively been announced before the law was amended. This raises a fundamental issue of governance. Laws enacted by this Parliament must guide executive action, not the other way around. The executive cannot make administrative decisions first and then come to Parliament seeking to regularise those decisions through legislative amendments.

What we appear to be witnessing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an attempt to correct or legitimize an administrative decision that should not have been made without the proper legal framework in place. The Fiji National University is a national institution of immense importance. It plays a vital role in providing tertiary education, technical training and workforce development for our country. Thousands of young Fijians rely on this institution to build their skills and secure opportunities for employment. Such an institution must never be treated as a political tool.

Universities must be governed with stability, consistency and respect for institutional integrity. Decisions affecting their governance should be guided by educational policy

considerations and national development objectives, not by political convenience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji National University is not a political football to be kicked from one Ministry to another. Institutions of higher learning require certainty and stability in governance arrangements. Constant shifts in ministerial oversight create unnecessary uncertainty within the institution and raise concerns among staff, students and stakeholders.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National University is a very important entity for our country, and I am a person who worked for 21 years in an organisation who became part of the FNU, so it is very important for me.

One of the points that has been made by the honourable Prime Minister is that one of the reasons is to align what happens at FNU with national priorities. We already have those mechanisms in place. The Minister appoints the Board members, and he gives instructions on policies. In our organisation in Fiji, we have set up a Higher Education Commission of Fiji, which determines where money is sent to which universities and for what programmes. You already have the systems in place to direct FNU on what to do. You do not need to do this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these have happened in New Zealand, in Australian National University, and even in Singapore. The honourable Attorney-General talked about Singapore being in the premises of that, but that is not true. Just ask Dr. Google, National University of Singapore – the Board members are appointed by the Minister for Education. What I am saying, there are systems already in place to make this happen.

Obviously, the problem is that the governance systems are not working – appointing the wrong members, perhaps, and not having the strong systems in place to make sure that they align their programmes with national interests. The systems are already in place. The problem is, you are not making the systems work because maybe the wrong players are there, whatever it is, that is happening.

There are some very major trends that are happening in our country, Mr. Speaker, Sir. For instance, look at the budget trends about the money that is going to FNU at the moment. In 2021, the budget to FNU was \$80 million, but by 2025, it went down to \$55 million – a 30 percent reduction in four years. Our national university, 30 percent reduction in these years. In how many years? In four years – 30 percent. At the same time, you have a new private sector organisation coming up and its budget has increased by 600 percent in three years. Let me say this.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am not interested in whether programmes take place in the private sector to make sure that we get skills going. However, it seems to me that there has been a decimation of what is happening in our national university. These are the facts and figures. What are you talking about?

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look, that is one of the big differences that we are having. There has been a strategic shift. If you look at the trends about what is happening over the past few years, there has been a shift in the way things are moving. They have talked about Singapore. What I am saying is, it seems that there has been a conflict between the Council and the Vice Chancellor. I had listened to both, and both of them are friends of mine. However, a complaint has been lodged in FICAC.

One of the things that comes to our mind is, is this a ploy to move attention away from the internal rumblings within the FNU itself – the conflict between the Council and the Vice Chancellor – and trying to move that out across the premises? If you are talking about aligning what happens with FNU with the national priorities, the mechanisms are already there, and it happens in all the national universities globally. You talk about the national universities of Singapore, you look at it, it is governed by the Ministry for Education. What I am saying is, is there some

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 62(1): “When speaking, a Member must not impute improper motives to any other Member.” This was by two of them, linking the motion to the so-called FICAC investigation, which is two separate issues.

MR. SPEAKER.- I take that on board, improper motive it is. Thank you. Proceed, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- These are the facts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not, nothing imputed. There was a whistleblower report in January of 2025. Allegations reported - bias discrimination in management decisions, bullying, victimisation of staff, management abuse of authority within the University leadership.

The Council raised a complaint against FICAC. That is a fact, not an imputation. It is a fact. The honourable Prime Minister has the prerogative to do so. He has decided not to talk to the Chairman, the former Chairman. I ask why? Why not? He was an appointment of Government. Another question to be answered. If this change takes place, will that investigation with FICAC continue? Will it continue or not? Are you the ones who call themselves - the Government that listens, going to listen?

The people that were appointed by the Government, the Chairperson, the former Chairperson of FNU, will you also listen to the former Chairperson of the Higher Education Commission of Fiji, Steve Chand, to hear what they have to say? If you really want to understand what is going on, first, you have to listen. Listen to all the players, get all the stories. Do not just look at things from one side.

I think the motives are good, but I do not think it is necessary because the mechanisms are already in place. There is a lot of other stuff that is happening that needs to be dealt with. And we do not sit here, reassured that the things that need to be cleaned up, and we do not know who is right and who is wrong, but it needs to be investigated because we are talking about our National University, our most important entity for developing skilled workers for the industries of this country.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not support this Bill.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to speak. There are three points that I want to make in response to the three speakers. Honourable Usamate is always very loud, but within that loudness, you know, he tries to misinform and mislead about what's happening.

The honourable Prime Minister has said very clearly that this is an amendment to bring the University of Fiji governance under his direct responsibility as Minister responsible for Strategic Planning. So, there is no contradiction, honourable Hem Chand, with respect to the governance structure in the shift to ministerial responsibility, to the honourable Prime Minister, to the Strategic Planning Ministry. There is no contradiction.

Honourable Usamate knows this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but he is trying to mislead. When he was talking about the budget of the University, the Government, you know, we provide millions of dollars in TELS scholarship to \$153 million in total, and a big chunk of that goes to the University. When you look at a budget for an institution funded by the Government, it is not run only on the Government budget.

In the case of the University of the South Pacific, there are other countries to which we give the contribution. In the case of the Fiji National University, every single cent that is spent on every single student that goes to the FNU is an income for that. You didn't get that. You are just looking at the budget. So, you know, don't mislead the strength of the University's finances because you are ignoring its total budget.

When we do the budget, when the Minister for Education or Higher Education does that, they do that. So please do not mislead.

Honourable Joseph Nand, again, you know, completely missed the point. He didn't even read the Bill properly, as the honourable Attorney-General said. Let's be honest. The FNU is an important institution. What is your point of order?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- It's okay.

MR. SPEAKER.- You want to come and sit here, honourable Usamate? Right. Thank you. Can you continue honourable Koroilavesau?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Standing Order 60 - Prohibited References. He is just basically attacking the Members who have spoken from this side. It is a different subject altogether that we are discussing.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, point taken.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I thought that Point of Order is irrelevant, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I was responding on the facts.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- He cannot dictate what is relevant and not relevant within. It is you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is relevant!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on the point, I was saying that honourable Joseph Nand went on a tandem, talking on a completely different subject to what the Bill is. The Bill, as the honourable Attorney-General said, is simply shifting the responsibility of the Minister responsible to another Minister and that is the Prime Minister. That is all it is.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I am mindful of the time constraints that we have and your directive that we try and round up our proceedings by 3.30pm, so I will be very brief. I

respect all the views that have been expressed, and I reiterate that the Amendment to the Act allows independent checks and balances on the policy role of the FNU Council and the operational and administrative role of the FNU management, where irregularities are detected, as some have implied here, and substantive evidence complied. Both the Council and the Management will be independently investigated. There have been whistle-blower reports who have drawn Government's attention to the purported cases of irregularities, but the Government shall only proceed to investigate, based on verified substantive evidence. That does not take the onus out of investigating agency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FNU Act Amendment 2026 is an opportunity to place a special, relevant and elevated focus on the future of the national University to nurture it into a highly professional education, learning, teaching and research institution like internationally recognised universities around the world, but unique in its own way.

The FNU will be a key catalyst for sustained economic growth and shall be at the very heart of our Government's vision of achieving a high income country status by 2050, supplying the skills needed for Fiji as the hub of the Blue Pacific, and I am excited about the opportunities the University will undertake in developing our country's skills needs to serve and work in transformational investment projects.

A few years ago, I was called to come to the aid of one of our regional neighbours and when I was asked to give a debrief by some Australian authorities, I mentioned to them, it is like driving along a highway and you see somebody being hit by a hit and run driver and you dutifully take them to hospital where they are administered with a blood transfusion and we bring the person back to good health. The very first thing he or she recognised the blood transfusion equipment and vigorously complained to the doctor. What are you doing this? I belong to this religion or this section. I am not allowed to receive anybody else's blood, but he was alive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is what we are doing for FNU, we are bringing it back, resuscitating it and letting it run as best as it can be. I commend the Bill before the House.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes: 30

Noes: 6

Not voted: 19

Motion agreed to

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Fiji National University Act 2009 (Bill No. 03/2026) and for related matters, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No. of 2026)]

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 27th April, 2026, at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our meeting for this week. At this juncture, I wish to thank all of you for your responses to His Excellency's most gracious Address.

I will now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 27th April, 2026, at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.27 p.m.