

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 7TH MARCH, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	312
Communications from the Speaker	312-313
Point of Order	313-315
Debate on His Excellency the President's Address - Hon. S.L. Rabuka (Right of Reply)	315-318
Adjournment	318-319

FRIDAY, 7TH MARCH, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.48 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Assistant Minister for Finance and honourable S.S Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 6th March, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting, and all of 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.

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the second group of participants of the Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

(Acclamation)

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Parliament, the heart of our nation's democratic process. Today, you are in an arena where laws are shaped, debates echo and decisions that impact every citizen are made. May this visit enrich your understanding of our democratic traditions and processes.

International Women's Day

Honourable Members, since we will not be meeting tomorrow, I am reminded to give a few remarks to commemorate International Women's Day, indeed, a day of profound significance. It is a day to acknowledge and honour the achievements of women across the world, and to recognise their invaluable contributions to societies everywhere. It is also a day for us all to renew and reaffirm our commitment to building a society where every woman has the opportunity to thrive, free from discrimination, free from fear, and with the full support of the community.

As we celebrate the women who have paved the way, let us also rise to the occasion - committed in our resolve to champion policies that promote gender equality, ensure safety and dignity, and create opportunities for women and girls to lead and inspire.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Usamate, a Point of Order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Sir. I move a Point of Order under Standing Order (74)(1)(a) which states, and I quote: “There is an alleged breach of Standing Orders or practices of Parliament.” It relates also to Standing Order 80 in terms of the explanation.

MR. SPEAKER.- You may proceed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister mentioned in this august House that according to the Australian Government's Infrastructure Assessment Report for Suva-Nausori Schools, that not a single classroom was built by the previous Government over the term. We have the report here, and we have seen it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has misled this House with what he said. He said that not a single classroom was built. He said something, which is the exact opposite of what happened in reality. I would like to call out the names of schools that were built during the period that he talked about by the former Government, as follows:

- Bau Central College;
- Jeremaiah College;
- Rishikul Primary School; and
- C.M.F. College.

So, what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has misled this House by saying something that is not true. He has called us ‘liars’, which is not in accordance with the principles of this House.

That is not the only one, Sir, that is a very serious statement. He also talked at length when we were talking about the FDB guarantee, when I said that he voted “noe”, and in the *Daily Hansard*, he actually said that there was a majority and “aye”. I have checked the *Daily Hansard* of 9th February, 2022 today, on that particular debate. It says that the motion is agreed to. The motion is agreed to does not indicate whether anyone has voted “aye” or “noe”.

I believe that that would have been by acclamation, but on the very next day, in the interview that he carried he out on 10th February, this is what he said, “he questioned the purpose of a motion for Parliament to approve a government guarantee of \$200 million borrowings.” So, there is no proof of what he said that he voted ‘yes’ because in the *Daily Hansard*, it says, “Motion agreed to.”

When you have an acclamation, there will be people who will be saying, “aye”, and those who will say, “nay”. There is no proof that he actually voted for that. So, in that way, he has misled the House when he said that he voted ‘yes’, but what is seen here, what he said immediately afterwards, and what the *Daily Hansard* shows, is that he is not telling us what actually happened,

that he is making up his own version of the truth. This is what is often called “fake truth”. Fake truth is not correct.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he raised a Point of Order on the terms of, when I said that the honourable Prime Minister had said certain things about the status of finances in the country and the economy, he said the exact opposite. Then he said that I was quoting from social media. But this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, comes from Government’s own news station, FBC, and I quote, “according to him, Fiji is in the midst of a financial crisis requiring

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- A Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, Point of Order.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Standing Order 74 as well, Mr. Speaker, about breaching practices.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- What number?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- He is talking about accuracy in statements. I have just spoken to the CEO of FBC for exactly that same report. He admitted to me this morning that they were wrong.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- What Standing Order?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Standing Order 74, I am using the same Standing Order you are using.

Sir, before he gets himself in trouble, I would like to counsel honourable Usamate, “let us not steer into conversations that are inaccurate.” That is all I am saying, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Usamate, I have listened so far to what you are saying in terms of trying to correct or point out that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, in his speech yesterday, had made certain observations about your comments and claiming that it was inaccurate. Now, you are saying that he was not correct in doing that. What I am trying to say to you is that you are pointing certain instances where you feel the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has misled the House. Correct?

Let me just try to summarise where you are going before I let him continue and, in fact, what you are trying to do is correct his statement from yesterday? Please, let me hear the rest.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Why I am raising these issues is because he raised a Point of Order on these specific issues. He said that these things are not correct, and I am pointing out that when he raised those Points of Orders on the things that he had said, that he is not correct, and I am correct.

The things that I am saying are the actual truth. He was trying to point out an untruth when, in fact, the untruth was what he said. I am pointing out here what he was raising Points of Orders on, not based on fact, and I am assuring that these are the facts that I am talking about. I am talking

about facts - news items. I have quoted that here, I have quoted from the *Daily Hansard*, these are facts.

He called us “liars”. From the other side, they tell lies. In this House, it is being done, I have corrected it here so we can see in this House and Fiji can see who is telling the truth and who is telling lies. That is why it is important. This is a house of hope, and we must talk about reality. If anyone says something that is wrong, that is not in the spirit of Parliament. We stand up in Parliament and we talk about the truth. Truth may not be something that you like, but it must be stated and out of that truth, we build a strong Parliament, and we build hope. It strengthens our democracy.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order.

I just want to remind the honourable Member, under Standing Order 81, that if you wish to look at a speech of a Member who has alleged to have misrepresented, you are supposed to do it immediately after that misrepresentation, not after that. He is not staying within time. If you wish to show misrepresentation, you can do that in any other way, but not through a Point of Order because it is not within time, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member. I will take your Point of Order and will make a ruling later on.

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

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I first of all apologise for wearing a scarf in Parliament, but we have been asked to show our support for our women by wearing the scarf. We ask you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to allow us to keep the scarf on in recognition of our champion women.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you very much for allowing me the right of reply and I address all honourable Members, my honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members. I also welcome those on the Senior NCO courses of RFMF who are here with us this morning. Also, I welcome those that are listening in to the broadcast and live feed broadcast this morning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank all honourable Members for their contribution to the motion in this House in thanking His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. This morning, at our caucus meeting, I reminded the Government Caucus that His Excellency the President is the Head of the Executive Branch, and we are the executors of the executive direction set for us.

During the debate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been a lot of naysayers (if I can call them that) who are already saying, “no, you have not done this.” His Excellency the President pointed out what the Government is going to do in this parliamentary year. We are basing most of the criticisms, those that have criticised aspects of the Address already saying that what you are saying you will do, you have not done, we have not done, we are going to. So, I thank all the honourable Members who have contributed. Over this past week, we have all acknowledged the gracious Address and then we have

very quickly come down to our own point of views about how Government is performing, or we expect Government to be performing.

His Excellency's Address serve as a reminder to each one of us of our collective duty to uphold the principles of democracy, good governance, inclusivity, and reminded us all that we are leaders in this nation. We plan the way we should go, and we execute the things that we say we will do. We are also reminded of our responsibility. The dignity of every Fijian should be reinstated, and people should be empowered to strive towards a good quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency's Address highlighted many of the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. Specifically, His Excellency called on us as servants of the people to learn from the many challenges that we face and invest lessons gained to maximising our opportunities. Turning those challenges to opportunities. As a government, we will continue to develop and deliver policies that prioritize unity, good governance, economic stability, sustainable development and national security.

As servants of the people, our focus should not only be on short-term growth but more so on long-term resilience, ensuring that Fiji will always remain strong in the face of global uncertainties. The words of our national anthem, "whatever befall" whatever comes our way, we must be resilient, we must be strong. Perhaps a central theme of His Excellency's Address is the need for transformational leadership. Leadership that is visionary, compassionate, inclusive and focused on nation-building.

In transformational leadership, we must reinstate the values of this nation. The values of deference, of compassion, of giving, of faith, love and forgiveness. To move from uniformity to diversity, from maintaining to creating, from delivering as we have been trained to be transformational.

For those to materialise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our multi-ethnic society, and I quote:

"... there must first be a willing mind, that our giving and co-operating is according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased, and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time (in our history) your abundance may supply their lack, and their abundance may supply your lack - that there may be equality. As is written in II Corinthians 8:12-15: 'He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.' For those that are given much, much is asked of them."

This morning, Mr. Speaker, I asked the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, who has given his apology as he has gone out to perform a ministerial duty which coincides with this hour of sitting, I asked him about the Pareto principle. The Pareto principle talks about the 20:80; 20 percent of the workforce produce 80 percent of the output. Perhaps, we can also look at that in the amount that we contribute to the revenue of the nation that, perhaps, only 20 percent of the entities we have that are paying taxes contribute to 80 percent of the national revenue.

We owe a lot to those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, successful businessmen and business houses and the successful people who contribute a lot to the economy by their effort and their hard work. They keep those of us who are in the 80 percent going. They pay our salaries. We try to ease the burden, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the cost of living by introducing such policies as VAT free items that we buy to ease the burdens of life. We believe that no one should be left behind and strictly speaking, I believe no one has been left behind.

People who complain or raise their concerns about what they are lacking, the Government responds. When notices are brought to our attention about deteriorating roads and bridges, we attempt to fix those. We can never keep up with the destructions of nature and time, but we can always try to make things better.

As a government, we fully embrace the vision of making things easier for everyone else, making things better for the next person, because someone else is trying to make things better for you. We look after each other, we watch each other's back. We cover for each other, as the students from the Senior NCOs course are very aware of. They are trained to look after each other. They are trained to look after us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency also spoke about the legislative agenda. We have a very ambitious agenda this year, but with the cooperation of the Opposition, I am sure we can go through those Bills that we have planned to be presented to the House, debate them properly, and execute them.

While the 2013 Constitution has guided us through the transitions of government in the previous two General Elections, we believe, in Government, that its review is essential to reflect the voices and aspirations of the people.

One of the honourable Members had highlighted the fact that we, since the beginning of Independence, we have had four Constitutions. Honourable Koya brought that up. His late father was responsible for the one of them, which was the 1970 Constitution - negotiation for that. The second two, I was responsible for, and the fourth one, I have no hand in. That is the one we are hoping to be able to amend, to be the People's Republic of Fiji Constitution.

If you look at the transformations, we have had from the first one that was given to us by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and signed into force by the late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, brought to us in the Instruments of Independence in 1970 by the then His Royal Highness, Prince Charles, now King Charles III.

The voice of the people were the views expressed by our Members of the House of Representatives at the time. The voters then had voted them into power, and they were the voice of the people.

We accepted the Constitution which was abrogated by the Head of the Military Government in 1987, and we adopted the Republican status. Her Majesty declared her position in Fiji no longer tenable, so the power came right back to the Interim Military Government of Fiji. Then the Military Government called a Commission which reported to the Great Council of Chiefs. The Chiefs adopted that Constitution of 1990, which also gave the people seven years to review that Constitution and amended it, which we did exactly seven years later in 1997.

That was the Constitution of the people, dealt with in this House by the representatives who were elected to office in 1992 under the 1990 Constitution, but they were obliged to review that Constitution within seven years of its promulgation, which they did on 25th July, 1997.

Now, we are going through the same process, and this is where we will need the cooperation of all the representatives of the people who are here. If we have to go back to them and solicit their support, canvas their views in a special Committee or in another Commission, whichever way we are going to solicit that support, we are currently the voices of the people. So, it is our responsibility to deal with that Constitution, as is proposed by the Government in the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2024.

We may not like the idea of reviewing it, but we are dutybound to do that, I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We invite all the citizens to participate in that process. On the one hand, it is the responsibility of the Government, so that the people participate in the formulation of the laws which they are required to obey. On the other hand, the nation's Constitution must reflect the aspirations of its people. These fundamentals are a starting point to ensure the legitimacy of laws and their adoption.

The Constitution as you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the system and the system dictates the outcome. Legitimacy means that the system and its general solutions are appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the people.

From that very simple and simplistic definition, we can see that the people's voice and aspirations do not feature in the current Constitution; that is my observation. Our role, as their representatives, is to ensure that they are heard, that justice is finally done, and their dignity is reinstated in the way they and we are ruled.

On economic growth and investment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had a lot of debate on that, but I am encouraged, Sir, that earlier on this week, I got a note from the honourable Leader of the Opposition, asking us to sit down and talk because there are so many important issues to be dealt with this year in this Parliamentary year and called for a bipartisan approach. I am hanging on to that note that was brought to me by the honourable Opposition Whip.

I was almost discouraged when we got into the debate and got a lot of flak from those behind him in the Opposition benches, but I am encouraged that they have made that approach. I want this august House to know that this Government side has been preaching about or encouraging bipartisanship and the actual request for a bipartisan approach to the important issues before us has come from the honourable Leader of the Opposition. So, the challenge is on you, honourable Members, that we approach all these important issues on a bilateral platform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members for their contribution. I believe we have covered every issue raised in His most Gracious Address by His Excellency the President. The rest is on us to see that we carry out those things, now based on our bipartisan approach to the various issues that we have been challenged to the resolve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those words, I thank the honourable Members for their contribution, and I commend the motion that is before this august House to thank His Excellency the President for his most Gracious Address.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 10th March, 2025, 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 sitting for this week. At this juncture, I wish to thank you all for your responses to His Excellency's most Gracious Address.

It has been my particular honour to preside over the debate, and listen, as indeed the rest of the country and our own people did, through pearls of wisdom tinged with philosophies of great leaders and statesmen of the world and, of our very own, of the past and now, to motivate us, you as our leaders, together with our people, to follow a better tomorrow.

For my part, I can only add my voice of support to His Excellency's most gracious Address when he opened our 2025 Parliamentary Session on 24th February, 2025. In the last two lines of our National Anthem, it states:

“Stand united, we of Fiji, fame and glory ever,
Onward much together, God bless Fiji.”

With that note, I trust, honourable Members, that you will catch up to some necessary rest before we resume with our Sitting next week. Honourable Members of the Business Committee, you are kindly reminded of our meeting which will be held at the Small Committee Room. But before that, let us enjoy tea and celebrate with our women Members of Parliament in the Big Committee Room afterwards.

Thank you, honourable Members. I now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 10th March, 2025, at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.26 a.m.