

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 16TH FEBRUARY, 2026

[UNCORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Communications from the Speaker	2-3
Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji	3-13
Adjournment	13-14

MONDAY, 16TH FEBRUARY, 2026

The Parliament met at 10.11 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Service and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation

Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General

Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development.

Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs

Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro, Minister for Education

Hon. Charan Jeath Singh, Minister for Public Enterprise and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts

Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry

Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services

Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

Hon. Agni Deo Singh, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations

Hon. Sashi Kiran, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Information, and Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Viliame Naupoto, Minister for Immigration

Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Minister for Policing and Communications

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bilitavu, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister for Office of the Prime Minister

Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Iliasa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Defence

Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Aliko Bia, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Ratu Josai Bulavakarua Niudamu, Assistant Minister for Justice

Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva, Assistant Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport

Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Sachida Nand, Assistant Minister for Commerce and Business Development

Hon. Shalen Kumar, Assistant Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs
Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica
Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal

Absent

Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Sanjay S. Kirpal

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's official Opening of the Fourth and Final Session of this Parliamentary term. Honourable Members, I trust that during the Prorogation period, you were able to find and spend valuable time with your families and loved ones. As we gather again today, I am confident that you return refreshed, renewed, and ready to contribute meaningfully to shaping the future of our nation.

I extend a warm welcome to our invited guests in the gallery, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Your Excellencies, High Commissioners, Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiaries, friends of Fiji, thank you for joining us today.

I recognise the presence in the gallery of a delegation of the members of the German Parliament, the Bundestag. You are most welcome to Fiji and to the Opening of our Parliament today. I also acknowledge those following today's proceedings via live broadcast and online streaming, whether from your homes or offices. Your continued interest in the work of Parliament is deeply appreciated.

This day holds special significance in our parliamentary calendar, as it marks the official opening of the Fourth and Final Session of the Third Term of the Fijian Parliament under the 2013 Constitution. The State Opening will be officiated by the President of the Republic of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Naiqama Tawakecolati Lalabalavu, *Na Gone Turaga na Tui Cakau, kai Vuvu ni Vanua o Cakaudrove*.

Honourable Members, as it is customary, the Judiciary, the third branch of the State, will join us in Chambers to hear His Excellency's Address. At this point, I invite the honourable Leader of the

Government in Parliament to invite the honourable Chief Justice, the honourable President of the Court of Appeal and the honourable Judges of the Court of Appeal and the High Court to join us in Parliament.

[Members of the Judiciary escorted into the Parliament Chambers by the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament and Secretary-General to Parliament retire from the Parliament Chambers to meet and escort His Excellency the President to Parliament.]

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

Mr. Speaker, Your Lordship the honourable Chief Justice and Members of the Bench, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers of Cabinet, honourable Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Agencies, Heads of the Disciplined Forces, Faith Leaders, Heads of Industry and civil society representatives, ladies and gentlemen, and my fellow citizens - good morning to each and every one of you, *namaste* and *ni sa bula vinaka* to you all. I acknowledge and thank you for your presence here this morning.

This morning, firstly I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we gather on today. *Ni bera saka ni'u tekivu, au cavuta na vakavinavinaka cecehia ki na Vanua Vakaturaga o Nadonumai, vua na Turaga na Tui Suva, ni rawa ni da mai sota ena dela ni soso vakaturaga oqo, esa mai dolavi kina na yabaki vou ni buli ni lawa me liutaki vinaka kina na noda vanua lomani.*

The three arms of Government - the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive, as well as Civil Society and Development Partners come together annually for the State Opening of Parliament.

I bid a very warm *namaste* and *ni sa bula vinaka* to our fellow citizens at home and abroad who join us on the various media platforms, television and radio. I acknowledge and encourage your keen civic interest in Government's legislative agenda for this year and beyond.

I am indeed privileged to officiate this morning in the formal opening of our new Legislative Session for 2026 and beyond. I do so in accordance with our Constitution to outline the legislative priorities and policy directions of Government for the year ahead and beyond.

This Address reflects the aspirations of our people and the collective responsibility of the arms of government to serve the national interest, and work towards the continued well-being of our fellow citizens.

At the outset, I acknowledge the sovereignty of our people, the wisdom of our elders, and the sacrifices of those who came before us. I pay tribute to the enduring strength of especially the diverse communities - iTaukei, the Indo-Fijian, the Rotuman and Banaban, and all who call Fiji home, including those living abroad.

Our diversity is our strength, and our unity is our purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we open this session of Parliament, I ask that we pause to reflect on our shared national journey since Fiji was ceded 152 years ago, and 55 years since we gained independence. This reflective pause will allow us as a nation to draw wisdom from our past, and to

honestly evaluate the present circumstances and gain clarity for our future direction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 152 years ago, when our forefathers ceded Fiji to her late Majesty Queen Victoria, they called for the promotion of good governance, Christianity, education, civilisation, trade and industry in the Deed of Cession. These goals remain relevant today, 152 years later. For 96 years, the Deed of Cession guided the governance of our people under the colonial administration before it was included in the Instruments of Independence, handed over by the then Prince of Wales and now His Majesty King Charles III on 10th October, 1970. When our leaders assumed the responsibilities of nationhood at Independence, they did so with humility and a profound sense of duty and optimism.

The Emerald Anniversary for the 55th year of our Independence last year presented an opportunity for national reflection on the responsibilities that accompany sovereignty and nationhood. Our collective commitment to build our nation and improve the lives of our citizens must be renewed by each generation through service, sacrifice and stewardship. As a nation, we are challenged to review not only how far we have come, but also how we collectively prepare for the decades ahead, how we safeguard our unity together and how we ensure that development is fair, inclusive and sustainable for all our people.

We aim for equilibrium to maintain a sense of balance that positions Fiji for the challenges that will come upon us. Our nation's journey through four successive constitutions, reflects an ongoing search for fairness, equality and stability. The journey has not always been smooth and underscores the fact that democracy must be actively sustained by dialogue, compromise, and respect for the rule of law. Each chapter, including moments of difficulty, has contributed to a deeper national maturity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, nation building has also been progressed through development. In the last 152 years since Cession, we have seen the expansion of education and health services, and the growth of transport, energy, and communications infrastructure across the nation. These achievements do not belong to any one generation or even government, but to the collective effort of our people who have always been at the heart of this journey. Farmers, fishers, teachers, nurses, civil servants, faith leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and athletes have all played their part. So too, those who have served Fiji beyond our shores through peacekeeping, service at international and regional level, and our diaspora communities carrying with them the value of our nation. Their contributions remind us that nationhood is sustained as much by character and service as it is by institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also learned through experience that progress cannot be measured by growth alone. While our economy has expanded over time, the benefits of development have not always been evenly shared. The Household Income and Survey (HIES) confirmed that hardship persists for many households, particularly among low-income families and in the vulnerable interior, rural and maritime, and even in urban communities. This requires humility in leadership and resolve in the making of policy and law.

Mr. Speaker Sir, Fiji's multicultural society is one of its greatest strengths, but unity does not arise automatically from diversity. Unity must be consciously built through fair laws, inclusive policies, respectful leadership, and a shared commitment to the common good. I, therefore, urge all honourable Members to approach their responsibilities with objectivity, discipline and respect.

Media Freedom and Parliamentary debate is the lifeblood of democracy, but it must be grounded in evidence, with good reason, and practical solutions. Political rhetoric and personal attacks may generate momentary attention, but they erode public trust and distract from the real challenges facing our people. History will judge this Parliament not by the sharpness of its debate,

but by the wisdom of its outcomes.

As we move towards an election year, you, our leaders carry an even greater responsibility. In a world marked by economic, environmental, and geopolitical uncertainty, our citizens look to you, their leaders for stability and vision. The tone you set in this House will shape not only public confidence today, but the health of our democracy tomorrow.

Let us, therefore, recommit ourselves to the spirit of Fijian nationhood not only on Fiji Day in October, but as a daily and enduring obligation to govern wisely, unite our people, and to leave for our future generations a nation that is fairer, stronger, and more cohesive, than the one we inherited.

Today, information is disseminated at unprecedented speed, but with little regard for accuracy across media platforms. The misuse of Artificial Intelligence is an emerging threat that will have a detrimental effect on governance, national unity and peace. While freedom of expression remains a cornerstone of our democracy, it carries with it a grave responsibility. I say “grave responsibility” because a freedom that is devoid of responsibility, is certainly very destructive.

A comment often made on social media today is, “*e yaga?*” In the *vosa vaka-Viti*, this queries whether the information being shared is useful.

This is the third of the three sieves that the Philosopher Socrates devised –

- The first sieve is – is it true? “*E dina beka?*” Is there evidence of the truth of the information?
- The second sieve is whether it is kind or good – “*E vinaka?*” Will it foster goodwill or ill-will?
- The third sieve is whether the information is useful - “*E yaga beka?*” Will it benefit anyone, or will it just create drama?

I, therefore, urge you, our leaders, media reporters, and citizens to exercise responsibility, discernment, and integrity in the sharing of information, so that public discourse strengthens unity rather than weakens it.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this year commenced with serious uncertainty at the global and regional levels. Technological change and artificial intelligence are reshaping labour markets. Economic volatility, geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, and impacts of climate change test the resilience of a small island developing state, including Fiji. Consequently, the impacts of global volatility are driving migration and urbanisation, creating unprecedented demographic shifts. These forces are beyond our control, yet nonetheless, they determine the choices we must make as a nation.

In our region, Pacific nations are navigating complex geo-strategic dynamics while striving to preserve peace, cooperation, and more importantly, their sovereignty. In this context, Government reaffirms its commitment to the long-held Pacific vision of our region as an “Ocean of Peace”. This concept was reinvigorated by our honourable Prime Minister, whose vision is founded on our shared history, our common vulnerabilities, and our collective assertion that the Pacific should not be an arena for conflict, rivalry, or militarization. Rather, that the Pacific should remain a region defined by dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect.

Government will continue to advocate for the Pacific as an Ocean of Peace at regional and international fora. We will work closely with our Pacific nation to strengthen regional institutions, uphold international law, and promote confidence-building measures that reduce tension and foster

trust. Fiji will continue to act as a responsible regional partner, one that values dialogue, multilateralism, and the peaceful resolution of differences. History teaches us that Pacific solidarity is not an abstract ideal, but a practical necessity for shared prosperity and security.

At home, we continue our recovery from recent global shocks, while confronting the rising cost of living and to ensure that economic growth translates into tangible improvements in household well-being. The HIES records that, prior to the pandemic, approximately one-quarter of our population lived below the poverty line, with another 25 percent facing hardship, struggling just above the poverty line in both the urban and rural communities. These findings reinforce the importance of formulating just laws and policies that are inclusive and well-targeted and grounded in evidence.

The Government's programme for 2026 and beyond seeks not only to grow the economy. In particular, growth must create decent work, protect the vulnerable, and invest in the capabilities of our people. In the formulation of programmes and policies, the Government will be guided by three principles:

- (1) Unity in diversity – ensuring that every citizen, regardless of background or place of residence, shares in national progress.
- (2) Sustainability and resilience – protecting our people, economy, and environment for the present and future generations.
- (3) Integrity and good governance – strengthening trust in public institutions and public leadership.

These principles will inform the formulation of legislation, budgetary decisions, institutional reform, and public policy across all sectors, and will serve as the compass for national decision-making in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker Sir, Government has commenced a review of the Constitution, as our supreme law must be a living document – it must evolve and reflect the aspirations, values, and lived realities of its people. The review will be undertaken responsibly, guided by the principles of democratic constitutionalism, good governance and respect for the rule of law. It will be informed by the conviction that constitutional governance must strengthen national unity, protect fundamental rights, and uphold the sovereignty of the people of Fiji.

Central to this review is meaningful public participation, transparency, and dialogue. Government is committed to ensuring that the voices of all Fijians—across communities, generations, and regions are heard and respected. Through structured consultations and expert engagement, the review will work to build broad-based consensus and reinforce public confidence in the constitutional framework that underpins our democratic institutions.

The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, like all other Bills, will be made public and undergo an extensive consultation process with robust public debate and input before it is tabled to Cabinet and even Parliament. In advancing this process, Government remains guided by the national interest and a shared determination to secure a constitutional order that supports peace, prosperity, unity for the present and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our national progress is grounded not only in policy and institutions, but in shared values of faith, compassion, especially with respect and service. As a multi-ethnic and multi-faith nation, Fiji draws strength from its diversity and its commitment to peaceful coexistence, dialogue and mutual understanding. At this juncture, allow me to thank especially the faith leaders of our nation who have come together to work closely with the police and authorities to combat the

spread of the illicit drugs in our nation. I also commend the honourable Minister for Policing, the Commissioner of Police, the Commander of the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces for their agreement to work together with faith leaders and community leaders in combating the scourge of illicit drugs that is fuelling the expansion of HIV cases across the nation.

I also pay tribute to our peacekeepers serving in the various missions around the globe today. Mr. Speaker, for 48 years, our peacekeepers have flown our flag proudly across the world. This year, Government will decide on the invitation for peacekeeping in Gaza and from the Israeli and United States governments. Fiji's global reputation in peacekeeping has enabled our nation to figuratively punch above its weight, and I am confident that our disciplined forces will rise to the challenge of new missions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must continue to nurture a national identity that honours tradition while embracing change. In this context, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission plays a vital role in promoting understanding, feeling and unity. Its mandate reflects our commitment to confronting challenging chapters of our history with honesty, courage and compassion. For the process to succeed, it must be inclusive, transparent and grounded in truth supported by community engagement and public awareness to ensure all voices are heard.

In this regard, may I encourage our national leaders, those of you here today and those of you outside of this august Chamber today, to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. In particular, I encourage everyone who has lived through the turbulent events of 1987, 2000 and 2006, and that includes me, and the aftermath of what happened, to participate in this process. They may choose to tell their story publicly or in camera, their participation will contribute to the Truth and Reconciliation process.

The Commission's findings and recommendations should be approached with maturity, guiding practical measures that strengthen reconciliation, institutional learning, and lasting social cohesion. Building on this foundation, the Government will continue initiatives that foster unity, inclusivity, and mutual understanding across all communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government recognises the enduring role of traditional institutions in shaping our national identity, leadership, and social cohesion. Government reaffirms that effective leadership for growth is strongest when traditional authority and Government operate in very close partnership. Structured partnerships can help mobilise resources, labour, and local knowledge in ways that support investments, entrepreneurship, and employment, while ensuring tangible benefits for landowning communities.

To support inclusive development, Government will advance an integrated review of the native land administration and the *iTaukei* institutions, to ensure they remain fit for purpose in a modern Fiji. Informed by constitutional principles and contemporary development realities, this review will seek to remove structural constraints that are rooted in colonial-era arrangements to integrate the isolated parts. This will bring *iTaukei* priorities and institutions to the mainstream of national development priorities.

Beyond institutional reforms, re-imagining Fiji's future requires a deliberate shift in the national mindset. Integration does not diminish identity, rather, it harmonises Fiji's diverse histories, institutions and values into a shared national vision. Transformation must, therefore, be:

- thoughtful and, that is, based on the right side of history and be factual;
- value-driven, that is, it should be guided by wisdom, empathy and conscience; and
- should be clearly articulated in the policy and law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on the partnership between traditional leadership, modern governance and economic development, Government recognises that our resources - the land, sea and the airspace are Fiji's most enduring strategic assets. This is intrinsically tied to the autochthonous status of the *iTaukei* people - *na uma qele se noqu vanua, kei na uma kawa, wili kina na i qoliqoli kei na maliwa lala*. The majority of land is collectively owned in the *vanua*, and significant areas remain underutilised.

There is a shared obligation to ensure that these resources are activated productively, sustainably, and in ways that we honour custodianship, intergenerational equity, and promote long-term resilience. Government, therefore, calls upon the landowners, institutions and communities to act in unity, aligning resource use with practical and inclusive development priorities.

Strategic engagements in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, renewable energy, housing, and the energy industries, will be essential to generating livelihoods, strengthening food and energy security, and expanding economic opportunity. Progress will depend on collaborations among landowners, Government, and the private sector, and development partners, grounded in transparency, trust, and a shared long-term vision.

The *iTaukei* concept of "*Sa i Doko na Karikari*", captures the leadership required at this juncture. It calls for vision, responsibility and unity, rooted in traditional authority, yet responsive to contemporary realities.

Traditional leaders must play a leading role in setting a clear and forward-looking direction, mobilising communities, fostering innovation, and ensuring that land and sea resources are utilised with purpose, while safeguarding culture and identity. Through principled leadership and strategic partnerships, *iTaukei* institutions must ensure that this opportunity is not delayed.

When aligned with national priorities, land and resource use becomes the foundation for resilience, dignity and shared prosperity. Therefore, development in the interior, rural and maritime areas must be brought into the mainstream of national development, especially in development planning and priority-setting, rather than being sidelined to a Ministry as an afterthought, where the catalysts for development are compartmentalised and treated as community projects - a constant since the colonial period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will prioritise macroeconomic stability, while advancing growth that creates decent jobs and raises living standards. This year, Government will continue with prudent fiscal management to reduce debt vulnerabilities, enhance revenue integrity, and ensure value for money in public spending.

To support these objectives, Government will advance public finance and economic law reform, including the modernisation of public finance management legislation, procurement regulations, and revenue administration laws, to strengthen transparency, efficiency, and parliamentary oversight in the use of public resources.

Mr. Speaker Sir, recognising the private sector as the main engine of growth, the Government will:

- further simplify investment approvals and reduce regulatory burdens;
- expand access to finance for small and medium enterprises, cooperatives, women-owned and youth-owned businesses; and
- promote public-private partnerships in infrastructure, housing and service delivery.

Special emphasis will be placed on empowering interior, rural and maritime economies, so that development reaches every province and island.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the transformation of our economy is central to securing sustainable and inclusive growth in the decades ahead. Economic diversification and value addition is essential in our resource-based sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and tourism.

Moving beyond the export of raw materials toward higher-value processing, innovation and services will boost job creation, resilience to external shocks, and ensure retention of a greater share of wealth.

Economic transformation becomes equitable and durable when resource owners participate as partners and entrepreneurs in value chains, investment decisions, and enterprise development.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in the Sugar Sector, Government will continue to focus strategically on mechanisation initiatives, measures to incentivise increased sugarcane production, and preparatory work for long-term structural reform of the sugar sector.

We remain focused on raw sugar production and renewable energy generation as contributors to export earnings and energy security. Government is exploring value-added diversification opportunities, including ethanol and refined sugar production, alongside plans for a new state-of-the-art sugar mill. The immediate priority remains strengthening cane production to ensure a reliable and sustainable supply of raw materials, which is essential for downstream processing and future diversification.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we all agree that agriculture remains central to livelihoods and, most importantly, food security. Government will continue to advance a resilient and sustainable non-sugar agricultural sector through the promotion of climate-smart farming practices, improved land and water management, and the adoption of innovative and adaptive technologies.

These measures are complemented by targeted investments in rural infrastructure, sustainability initiatives, and capacity-building programmes for farmers. These measures will protect rural livelihoods, stabilise food production, and ensure that agriculture remains a strong pillar of the national economy.

Mr. Speaker Sir, Fiji will continue to exercise regional leadership and advocate internationally for the long-term sustainability of fisheries resources through legislative reform, strengthened marine conservation, and enhanced enforcement.

Mr. Speaker Sir, Government will continue with the sustainable management and development of the forestry sector, with a focus on responsible forest management, landscape restoration and biodiversity conservation. Central to this approach is ensuring that landowners' interests, rights and livelihoods remain at the heart of sectoral progress.

Recent legislative reforms have modernised the forestry governance framework, strengthening sustainability standards, compliance mechanisms, and boosting investor confidence.

Value-addition remains central to the Government's strategy, supporting innovation, expanding market access, and creating high-value employment opportunities. Inclusive growth within the forestry sector will be promoted through targeted initiatives that expand opportunities for women and youth, including participation in nurseries, replanting programmes, forest restoration, cottage industries, and value-adding enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, public enterprises are central to our economic infrastructure, delivering essential services, driving investment and supporting inclusive growth. Government will continue to focus on strengthening governance, performance and accountability in State-owned enterprises. These measures aim to ensure that public enterprises deliver quality services, generate sustainable returns, and support socio-economic development for all Fijians.

Government will advance strategic partnerships with the private sector and development partners to attract investment, promote innovation, and facilitate infrastructure development. Focus areas will include energy, water, transport, telecommunications, and commercial services where improved enterprise performance can drive economic resilience, job creation, and enhance service delivery across urban and rural communities.

Government is also working to revitalise Fiji's shipbuilding sector. A feasibility study for the establishment of a new shipbuilding facility is already underway. This will attract investment opportunities for shipbuilding and ship repair services and contribute to Fiji's progress as a maritime nation. It will also boost training and employment opportunities for our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tourism industry will continue to be a pillar of economic recovery and job creation. Despite global uncertainties, the sector performed better than expected in 2025, with visitor arrivals reaching a record high of 986,367 visitors.

Tourism development is being diversified beyond the traditional centres. Joint initiatives such as the Na Vualiku Project, supported by the World Bank and other development partners, will boost infrastructure development, community-based enterprises, and inclusive growth. As part of the implementation of the Na Vualiku Project, honourable Members, I am pleased to confirm that even my *mataqali* has approved, in principle, the plans for the use of our land at Vunilagi, for a new airport to serve the people of our second largest island - Vanua Levu.

Government will continue working closely with the industry to grow tourism responsibly through the –

- introduction of our first ever tourism legislation;
- establishment of national standards; and
- opening of new destinations by Fiji Airways, with diversified offerings, ensuring long-term sustainability and shared benefits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through targeted policy support, infrastructure investment, skills development and improved access to finance, Government aims to foster a competitive manufacturing sector that supports small and medium enterprises, strengthens food security and contributes to resilient economic growth. To enable this transformation, Government will modernise commercial laws, including company and insolvency legislation and secured transactions frameworks to improve access to finance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government remains committed to advancing digital transformation as a foundation for inclusive, resilient and sustainable growth. This agenda focusses on expanding digital access, strengthening communications infrastructure and building the skills required for the full participation of Fijians in the digital economy. Ongoing reforms to modernise public services and regulatory systems are improving how citizens and businesses access Government services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to play a central role in maintaining and upgrading the physical and operational foundations of Fiji's economy. The systematic maintenance, rehabilitation and climate proofing of critical public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, ports,

jetties, public buildings and essential services, are being prioritised. In the transport sector, Government is advancing improvements across both, road and maritime networks, to strengthen national connectivity and support inclusive growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is prioritising the delivery of a high quality, equitable and relevant education system, guided by the Denarau Declaration; the review of the Education Act; and the holistic review of our education system by the Education Commission.

Targeted investment in school infrastructure, vocational opportunities and essential learning resources, complemented by the financial assistance and decentralised service delivery, is reducing barriers to learners, particularly in the interior, the rural and the maritime areas.

At the same time, legislative reforms and modernisation of the legal framework will strengthen governance, accountability and alignment with national skills needs across early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to strengthen the health system through reforms that are people-centred and evidence-based. These efforts will be guided by a strong emphasis on prevention, primary healthcare, system efficiency and equity, particularly for the interior, rural, maritime, and vulnerable communities.

The recent Health Transformation Summit brought together leaders, professionals, community representatives and development partners, to chart a shared path forward. The Summit outcomes will inform a new Health Strategic Plan, with a focus on prevention, primary healthcare system, especially based on resilience and sustainable reform.

The Government will work to ensure that the health reforms translate into accessible quality services and healthier lives for all Fijians. The legislative reform in the health sector will continue to ensure that laws remain fit for purpose and responsive to serve evolving challenges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to strengthen social protection systems through its national commitment to gender equality, inclusion and social protection. Empowering women to participate in economic and civic efforts is essential to family and community development, national prosperity and inclusive growth.

Support for vulnerable households, older persons, and persons with disabilities, will continue to expand through social protection programmes that promote dignity, security, and equal opportunity.

Government will develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, engaging stakeholders to deliver effective targeted interventions for those who are most in need.

Child protection will continue to be strengthened through new legislation, dedicated support services and comprehensive prevention strategies, while enhancing care frameworks for older persons.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government remains committed to supporting the development of our youth through inclusive initiatives, school-based programmes and community engagement, to foster character, leadership skills and civic responsibility among young people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to improving living standards and expanding access to secure, resilient and well-planned housing across Fiji.

Central to this commitment is the upgrading of informal settlements. To-date, 48 development leases have been secured – 21 in the Western Division, 14 in the Northern Division and 13 in the Central Division. Three settlements have already been fully upgraded and formalised, offering long-term leases that allow families to invest confidently in their homes and neighbourhoods.

Access to home ownership is being expanded by Government through support for first-time buyers, and innovative housing finance models from the Housing Authority, Public Rental Board and the Fiji Development Bank. Thousands of families have already benefitted, achieving secure and sustainable home ownership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change is the defining challenge of our time. Fiji will continue to remain a global leader in climate advocacy, while acting decisively at home. The Government's key priorities include:

- securing accessible, predictable and grant-based climate finance;
- scaling of support for adaptation; and
- operationalising loss and damage arrangements.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we commence this new Legislative Session as our nation moves towards a general election, an essential expression of democratic choice and civic responsibility. Elections must be a contest of ideas and vision, never of fear or division.

The strength of our democracy lies not only in the ballot, but in the conduct of leaders and citizens alike, not only during elections, but especially in the lead-up to and after elections. To secure our democracy, leaders and political supporters must continue to engage in dialogue, compromise, and respect for the rule of law.

I, therefore, call upon all who seek public office, and all who participate in public discourse, in particular, supporters of political parties and candidates, to uphold the highest standards of integrity, restraint, and respect for our multicultural society.

The programme outlined today reflects a vision for a confident, inclusive, and resilient Fiji - one that honours the legacy of the Deed of Cession and our Independence, while preparing our nation and citizens, for the challenges of a changing world.

The success of this vision depends on all of us - not only the arms of Government. The private sector, faith communities, civil society, every village and community, every family and citizen, and every one of us, must all play our part.

May this new Legislative Session be guided by wisdom, courage, and unity of purpose. I pray that your deliberations will serve the long-term good of the Republic. May God continue to Bless our beloved Fiji.

I now declare the 2026 Session of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji open. *Vinaka vakalevu, dhaanyavaad* and thank you.

(Acclamation)

[His Excellency the President retires from the Chair and is escorted out of Parliament by Mr. Speaker and the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.]

[Mr. Speaker assumes the Chair]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members of Parliament, the honourable Chief Justice, the honourable Judges, President of the Court of Appeal and members of the Fiji Bench; today marks the opening of the fourth and final session of this parliamentary term - a moment that reflects the enduring democratic values guiding our nation. I wish to express my sincere gratitude and respect to the honourable Chief Justice, the honourable President of the Court of Appeal and Honourable Judges. Your presence here is always an honour for us all.

This occasion highlights the vital partnership between the Legislative and the Judicial branches. It is through this collaboration that we uphold justice and safety and safeguard the rights and freedoms of our people. The mutual respect and cooperation between our institutions form the foundation of our nation's strength and stability.

As we begin this fourth and final session, I am confident that our shared commitment, especially in the field of law and order, will drive meaningful progress and positive changes. Let us continue to work with unity and dedication, building on the spirit that has brought us here together today. I thank you.

To the honourable Members of Parliament and invited guests, the honourable Chief Justice and members of the Fiji Judiciary will now retire from the Parliamentary Chambers.

[Members of the Judiciary retire from Parliament Chambers.]

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 9th March, 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, the fourth and final session of Parliamentary Term has now been formally opened by His Excellency the President. With this, all Parliamentary business, including Standing Committee deliberations on Bills, Motions and Reports, will resume or continue as scheduled.

I wish to thank each one of you for your presence on this auspicious occasion and my gratitude also extends to our distinguished guests, and to those following the proceedings via live broadcast on television and online.

Our next Parliament Sitting will begin with a motion by the honourable Prime Minister, thanking His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. Following that, honourable Members, we will have the opportunity to contribute to the debate as agreed to in the circulated Batting Order.

Before I adjourn, I warmly invite all honourable Members and all our guests to join us for refreshments, which will be served in the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members of Parliament, Parliament now stands adjourned until Monday, 9th March, 2026 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.38 a.m.