

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	2073
Communications from Deputy Speaker/Speaker	2073,2104
(1) Welcome	
(2) Pacific Pre-COP31 Briefing	
Presentation of Reports of Committees	2074-2079
(1) Review Report - Nasinu Town Council 2018Annual Report	
(2) Review Report - Tavua Town Council 2020Annual Report	
(3) Consolidated Review Report - Labasa Town Council 2019-2021Annual Reports	
(4) Review Report - Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2023 and 2024Annual Reports	
(5) Review Report on Assets Fiji Pte Limited 2020-2024 Annual Reports	
Questions	2080-2110
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Calibrating Breathalyser Equipment	(Q/No. 225/2026)
(2) Growth of Fiji's Major Urban Centres	(Q/No. 226/2026)
(3) Implementation of the Reviewed National Employment Policy	(Q/No. 227/2026)
(4) National iTaukei Resource Owners Council	(Q/No. 228/2026)
(5) Policy Initiatives and Infrastructural Support – Cane Growers	(Q/No. 229/2026)
(6) Monitoring & Compliance - Mining and Quarrying Operations	(Q/No. 230/2026)
(7) Plans to Upgrade the Nadi to Lautoka Highway	(Q/No. 231/2026)
(8) Integrated Tourism Master Plan – Na Vualiku Programme	(Q/No. 232/2026)
(9) Reduction of Drug Related Cases in Schools	(Q/No. 233/2026)
(10) Feasibility Study for the Proposed Yasawa Island Airport	(Q/No. 234/2026)
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Statistics of Pending Cases with the Judiciary	(Q/No. 235/2026)
(2) Seismic Events Recorded in 2025-2026	(Q/No. 236/2026)
Procedural Motion for the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026	2110-2131
Suspension of Standing Orders	2124-2125
Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026	2131-2132

WEDNESDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.36 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 29th September 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and all those who are joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast on television.

Pacific Pre-COP31 Briefing

Honourable Members, the honourable Prime Minister and the following honourable Ministers are requested to attend a briefing on the Pre-COP programme later today at 1.30 p.m. This will be held in the Small Committee Room. The Ministers are as follows:

- (1) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce, Business Development and Public Enterprises;
- (2) Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade;
- (3) Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management;
- (4) Minister for Housing and Local Government;
- (5) Minister for Finance;
- (6) Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources;
- (7) Minister for iTaukei Affairs; and
- (8) Minister for Information and Environment and Climate Change.

The briefing will be convened by the honourable Minister Lynda Tabuya to provide an update on Fiji's participation in the Pacific Pre-COP31.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report - Nasinu Town Council 2018 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Report on the Review of the 2018 Nasinu Town Council Annual Report. In undertaking this review, the Committee examined the Council's performance, governance and service-delivery arrangement, and sought written responses and clarification from the Nasinu Town Council. This process enabled the Committee to assess the progress made during the reporting period and to identify matters requiring continued attention.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee notes that Nasinu is Fiji's largest municipality by population and continues to experience rapid urban growth. These pressures have significant implications for the Council's financial sustainability, infrastructure planning, waste management, and ability to respond effectively to the needs of ratepayers and residents. The review highlighted the needs for the Council to strengthen its revenue base and align rate collection with the cost of municipal services and improving coordination with the Fiji Roads Authority, Water Authority of Fiji and Waterways. Further, the Council must address the rising costs of solid waste management and illegal dumping while working closely with the Ministry of Housing to support the formalisation of informal settlements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee considers that timely implementation of the recommendations in this Report will strengthen accountability, improve service delivery and a better position the Nasinu Town Council in responding to the need of its growing municipality. The Committee therefore encourages the Council and the relevant government agencies to work collaboratively in addressing the matters raised.

To conclude, I sincerely thank the Special Administrator of the Nasinu Town Council and official for their service and contributions to this review process. I am thankful to the honourable Members - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Parveen Bala for their invaluable contribution and support during this review process. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Tavua Town Council 2020 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Review Report on the Tavua Town Council 2020 Annual Report.

The Committee conducted a comprehensive examination of the operations, governance, financial performance and service delivery of the Tavua Town Council during the reporting period. Through its deliberations and engagement with Council officials, the Committee gained valuable insight into the achievements, challenges and opportunities faced by the municipality.

The review highlighted several important issues requiring attention, including the need to regularise fees and charges, improve the sustainability of the solid waste management services, addressing sewerage and environmental concerns, progress key capital infrastructure projects, resolve persistent drainage, flooding issues and strengthening financial management practices.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee also acknowledges the Council's efforts in pursuing sustainable development initiatives and supporting community well-being despite the operational and financial challenges encountered during this reporting period. These efforts demonstrate the important role local authorities play in advancing economic, social and environmental outcomes for their communities which they serve.

On behalf of the Committee, I express my sincere appreciation to the Acting Chief Executive Officer and the staff of Tavua Town Council for their co-operation, professionalism and valuable contributions throughout the review process.

I also extend my gratitude to the honourable Members of the Committee - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Parveen Bala for their invaluable contribution and support. Further, I extend my appreciation to honourable Ketan Lal as an Alternate Members for the Committee throughout this reporting period. I commend this Report to Parliament and trust that its findings and recommendations will contribute to stronger local governance, improved municipal services and sustainable development for the people of Tavua.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report - Labasa Town Council 2019-2021 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.-Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Consolidated Review Report on the 2019-2020 (January to July) and 2020-2021 Labasa Town Council Annual Reports. The Reports were referred to the Committee pursuant to Standing Order 109(2)(b) and were examined in accordance with the Committee's constitutional mandate and the Standing Orders of Parliament.

The Committee's review highlighted significant challenges affecting the Council, including the loss of revenue following the repeal of business licensing fees, the need to upgrade and expand

Subrail Park, increasing pressure on the Namara Landfill, limited funding of services to Rotuma, Dreketi and Seqaqa, and delays to planned developments and capital projects. The recommendations in this Report are intended to strengthen revenue recovery, infrastructure planning, waste management, service delivery and timely implementation of priority projects ahead.

The Committee is urging the responsible authority to act on the recommendations in this Report and monitor progress so that residents of Labasa and the communities served by the Labasa Town Council benefit from reliable, equitable, and sustainable municipal services.

On behalf of the Committee, I express my sincere appreciation to the Special Administrators, Acting Chief Executive Officer, and staff of the Labasa Town Council for their cooperation, professionalism and valuable contributions throughout this review process.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also extend my gratitude to the honourable Members of the Committee - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Paaveen Bala for their invaluable contribution and support. Further I extend my appreciation to honourable Joseph Nand and honourable Vijay Nath as alternate members of the Committee.

I commend this Report to Parliament and trust that its findings and recommendations will contribute to stronger local governance, improved municipal services and sustainable development for the people of Labasa.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, it is my pleasure to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs on the review of the Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports.

The Committee acknowledges the Fund's positive performance during the review period. Despite the ongoing challenges confronting the sugar industry, the Sugar Cane Growers Fund (SCGF) recorded improved profitability, maintained a stable lending portfolio, strengthened its investment position, and continued to pursue initiatives aimed at enhancing its long-term sustainability. The Committee also notes that the Fund's continued commitment to improving service delivery through digital transformation initiatives, concessional lending programmes, legal services, financial assistance schemes and support programmes designed to assist both existing and new cane

growers.

The Committee further acknowledges the Fund's efforts to modernise its operations and strengthen governance, risk management and compliance framework. Notwithstanding these achievements, the Committee's consultations with cane growers, industry stakeholders and representatives of the Sugar Cane Growers Council highlighted a number of concerns relating to the accessibility, adequacy and responsiveness of SCGF services.

The Committee also notes the growing concerns expressed by growers regarding rising production costs, increasing lease renewal premiums, labour shortages and the affordability of modern farming equipment. Evidence received during the review highlighted the increasing financial pressures being experienced by growers and the importance of ensuring that financial assistance remains accessible, responsive and aligned to the evolving needs of Fiji's sugarcane farming community.

The Committee further received submissions concerning governance and representation within the Fund. Concerns were raised regarding the removal of direct grower representation from the board following legislative amendments and the perceived implications this had on grower confidence, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement.

The Committee also notes the ongoing review of the Sugar Cane Growers Fund Act 1984. Evidence received during the review highlighted the need to modernise the legislative framework governing the Fund to strengthen governance arrangements, improve institutional flexibility, support innovation, and diversification. Throughout the review, the Committee observed that many of the challenges faced by SCGF are intrinsically linked to broader issues confronting the sugar industry, including uncertainty surrounding agricultural leases, rising production costs, labour shortages, declining participation of younger generations in farming, climate-related impacts, and the need for stronger coordination among industry institutions.

In light of the financing challenges faced by growers and the broader agricultural sector, the Committee is of the view that consideration should be given to progressively transforming the Fund into an agricultural commercial bank. Such a model would enable the institution to expand its financial products and services, improve access to affordable credit, support agricultural diversification, promote entrepreneurship, facilitate investment in modern farming practices and create a wider base of agricultural producers while maintaining its core commitment to cane growers.

The Committee therefore emphasises the importance of continuing legislative reform, strengthening stakeholder engagement, improving access to affordable financing, enhancing grower participation and representation, supporting mechanisation, and ensuring that future investments, services and programmes remain aligned with the evolving needs of Fiji's cane growers. These measures will be essential in maintaining confidence in the Fund.

I also acknowledge the valuable contribution of my fellow Committee Members - honourable Premila Kumar, honourable Semi Koroilavesau, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, and honourable Kalaveti Ravu, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Consolidated Review Report to Parliament and respectfully urge all honourable Members of this august House to take note of its findings and recommendations.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report on Assets Fiji Pte Limited 2020-2024 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I am pleased to present the Consolidated Review Report on the Assets Fiji Pte Limited Annual Reports for the financial years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. This Report presents the Committee's assessment of Assets Fiji Pte Limited's (AFPL) performance, governance, financial management, and stewardship of public access during the reporting period.

In undertaking this review, the Committee examined the annual reports, considered supplementary information provided by the company, received written submissions and conducted a public hearing with representatives from Assets Fiji Limited. Through this process, the Committee was able to evaluate the company's achievements, identify operational challenges and consider opportunities to enhance its contribution to economic development and the management of strategic public assets.

The Committee further notes the importance of timely annual reporting in ensuring effective parliamentary oversight, transparency and accountability. While the review enabled the Committee to retrospectively assess AFPL's performance across multiple reporting years, the Committee emphasises that the timely submission and consideration of annual reports remain essential for informed parliamentary scrutiny and responsive decision making.

The Committee acknowledges the important role played by Assets Fiji Pte Limited as the Government's asset holding company since its establishment in 2015.

The Committee commends AFPL for demonstrating resilience throughout the review period, particularly in navigating the economic disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent recovery period.

The Committee further notes the substantial growth in the company's asset base over the review period. Total assets increased from approximately \$64.36 million in 2020 to more than 92 million by 2024, reflecting asset revaluations and the continued stewardship of strategically important Government-owned land holdings.

The Committee also observed positive developments in AFPL's operational performance during 2023-2024. The company continued to strengthen its engagement with lessees, maintain sustainable lease arrangements, and preserve revenue stability.

Notwithstanding these achievements, the Committee identified several areas requiring attention and improvement. A recurring issue observed throughout the review period is the relatively modest returns generated from a substantial asset portfolio.

While the Committee acknowledges that AFPL operates within a framework of historical lease arrangements, nominal rental agreements and asset-use restrictions associated with public

sector ownership, it considers that there remains considerable scope to improve asset utilisation, optimise commercial returns and unlock greater value from underutilised holdings.

The Committee further notes concern regarding the level of detail provided within the annual report. Information relating to lease portfolios, occupancy levels, tenancy classifications, revenue, composition and asset utilisation rates was limited.

The Committee is of the view that AFPL's future success should not be measured solely by its ability to preserve and manage assets, but also by its capacity to generate broader economic benefits from those assets.

The Committee further observed that AFPL's annual reports did not provide explicit reporting against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or broader Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) indicators.

The findings and recommendations contained in the Report are intended to strengthen AFPL's governance, transparency, accountability, and operational effectiveness. They focus on improving disclosure practices, reviewing existing lease arrangements, enhancing asset utilisation, strengthening sustainability reporting, resolving outstanding asset vesting matters and establishing a clear strategic framework to guide the company's future growth and development. Collectively, these measures will better position AFPL to maximise returns from public assets, support economic growth and deliver greater value to the people of Fiji.

I extend my appreciation to the Chairperson, Board of Directors, management and staff of Assets Fiji Pte Limited for their cooperation and constructive engagement throughout the Committee's review.

I must also acknowledge the valuable contributions of my fellow Committee Members - honourable Premila Kumar, honourable Semi Koroilavesau, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Kalaveti Ravu, honourable Alikia Bia, and honourable Jone Usamate, who was an alternate Member. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Review Report to Parliament.

The Committee is confident that the implementation of its recommendations will strengthen governance, improve transparency and accountability, maximise the value derived from public assets and support long-term strategic development of Assets Fiji Pte Limited. Ultimately, these measures will contribute to stronger public sector stewardship and ensure that economic benefits are generated from these national assets are realised for the benefit of all Fijians.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Calibrating Breathalyser Equipment (Question 225/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament whether Fiji has the capacity to calibrate breathalyser equipment domestically and how often such equipment is calibrated?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, to answer the question directly, no, while the Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards is Fiji's technical authority for National Measurement Standards and metrology, Fiji does not presently have a fully established and accredited domestically capability to undertake the calibration of evidential breathalyser instruments.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate that the honourable Member's question relates to Fiji's domestic capacity to calibrate breathalyser equipment. It is important to place this in the context of the Fiji Police Force operational use of breath-analysis instruments.

The Fiji Police Force's evidential breath-analysis instruments are currently calibrated through a recognised specialist calibration facility operated by a company Drager in Melbourne, Australia. It is a cheque for calibration costs roughly over \$F200,000. This arrangement provides access to specialised calibration facilities, accredited technical expertise and internationally recognised standards necessary to ensure the accuracy, reliability and evidential integrity of the instruments.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Fiji Police Force's instruments are calibrated on a 12-month cycle through a recognised overseas calibration provider. This ensures that the instruments maintain their required level of accuracy and reliability thereby supporting the integrity of breath alcohol testing and enforcement activities.

An officer from the Ministry of Trade will always accompany officials from the Fiji Police Force to Australia to witness the calibration process. In addition to the scheduled annual calibration, an instrument may also require inspection, verification, servicing or re-calibration if it has been under repair, damaged, is malfunctioning or is otherwise identified as requiring technical attention.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while Fiji does not presently have the capacity to calibrate evidential breathalyser instruments domestically, the Government is actively exploring and investing in the requirements needed to establish this capability.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I would like to ask this particular question since I was approached by a member of public who brought it to my attention that a driver of a vehicle hit a gate, and when the Police was asked to conduct a breathalyser test on the driver, they advised that they could not since the breathalyser metres was sent to abroad for calibration. This is the reason why I wanted to ask the initial question. Has the Ministry assessed whether expired or improperly calibrated equipment would affect the validity of drink-driving prosecutions?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an ongoing operational matter, given our ability to ensure that all equipment at the frontline is fully functional and within the proper standards. I would like to ask the honourable member if she has some additional information to let

me know so I can follow up. If it is an operational matter, I will take it up with the Commissioner of Police.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- As a matter of practice, what is the appropriate number of days between testing of our machines? I understand from offshore examples, it is regularly done at least 180 days or 90 days. What is the number of days before we send our machines for calibration?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said, for an operational matter this is a very sensitive issue, when we are required to be up to par with our equipment and also have the ability to use the equipment well. I have come across a few situations where, perhaps for operational reasons, we failed to ensure that the timelines are followed and the operational check, or what we call in military line ‘a daily operational parade state of your vehicle and your people’. However, it depends on the use and handling of equipment. This is indeed a sensitive matter, and the onus is really on the Director of Traffic operations to ensure that all equipment are operationally on board to meet front-line operations.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Minister, how many breathalyser units does the Fiji Police Force currently have and how many are operational by Divisions? Madam Deputy Speaker, why I am asking this question because recently a PSV driver was stopped at the Rewa Bridge. It was fortunate that I was with him, and he only had two bottles of beer. The next morning, after probably 12 hours, he was driving, and he was caught at the Rewa Bridge. He was fined, and his licence was taken. I knew that the machines had to be calibrated; otherwise, I would have appealed. I requested him to appeal the matter.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Was it just a statement or did you have an actual question for the Minister? I think you, the Minister would probably ask you again, as he said to honourable Kumar, just give him a call and give him the details.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- To satisfy the honourable Member, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would invite him to come over to the Director of Traffic's office. He will be able to give you a full brief. If that is too far, you can come up to my office; I can give you a detailed brief separately, honourable Member.

HON. V. NATH.- This is the second time he is inviting me, and I am definitely going to go.

Growth of Fiji's Major Urban Centres
(Question No. 226/2026)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the work undertaken over the past four years to guide the orderly and sustainable growth of Fiji's major urban centres?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker this Coalition Government has undertaken substantial work over the past four years to plan for the growth of Fiji's major urban centres. This work is important Madam Deputy Speaker, because the 2017 population housing census recorded 55.9 percent of Fiji's population of 494,000 people living in urban areas. The national development plan now places the urban share at approximately 58 percent.

In practical terms Madam Deputy Speaker, almost six out of every 10 Fijians live in towns, cities and surrounding urban areas. The way we plan those areas, therefore, affects where families

live, where businesses invest, how people move, and the pressure placed on roads, drainage, water, wastewater and other public infrastructure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the question is whether urban centres will continue to grow. They will. Our responsibility is to ensure that this growth is planned, coordinated, resilient and sustainable. For the past four years, the Ministry, through the Department of Town & Country Planning has concentrated on three areas:

- (1) preparing long-term plans for major urban corridors;
- (2) modernising the way development applications are processed; and
- (3) strengthening planning laws and systems so that population investment growth can better coordinate with infrastructure and public services.

The centrepiece of this work is the strategic master plan for Viti Levu together with the concept plans for the greater Suva-Nadi-Lautoka urban corridor. The National Development Plan recognises this work as the 50th year planning framework supported by 5-year targets to better coordinate land use, infrastructure investment and sustainable urban development.

This concept master plan help Government identify where future housing, businesses, investment growth can occur, what roads, water, wastewater drainage and transport links will be needed, and which environmental risks and land constraints must be addressed before development proceeds. By September 2024, the Concept Master Plan had been completed. The Ministry then moved into the detailed master plan phase, which is intended to work on the long-term vision and to practical at the corridor, municipal, and neighbourhood levels. As part of this work, the Ministry is progressing detailed planning for priority urban areas, including neighbourhood-level planning work in Nasinu, within the Suva-Nausori corridor. The purpose is to move from broad strategic direction to practical land use, infrastructure, connectivity, and development decisions on the ground.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our planning records show why this work is necessary. Between 2022 and 2025, 217 final changes to town planning schemes were approved across Fiji. Of these 146, or approximately 67 percent, involved land being rezoned for commercial use. Nasinu recorded 57 approved changes, followed by Suva with 44, Nausori with 33, and Nadi with 29. Together, these four urban centres accounted for about three-quarters of all final scheme changes during the four-year period. These figures show that urban growth is not only creating demand for housing, but also creating strong demand for land, for shops, offices, professional services, and other economic activities. Commercial growth, therefore, needs to be planned together with roads, parking, drainage, water, wastewater, and municipal services, rather than relying mainly on individual land use changes after development pressure has already emerged.

The scale of physical development is also significant. Fiji Bureau of Statistics data compiled from permits issued by city and town councils shows that 5,094 building permits were issued between 2022 and 2025, presenting approximately \$1.82 billion in declared construction work. The annual value of permitted work increased from approximately \$306 million in 2022 to \$630 million in 2025. Although the number of permits varied from year to year, the value of development passing through the approval system increased substantially.

Planning is not intended to prevent development. Its purpose is to ensure that development occurs in appropriate locations, meets proper standards and can be supported by the infrastructure and services that communities require.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry is also working with municipal councils, regulators, utility providers, and professional bodies to develop the Building Permit Approval System (BPAS).

The aim is to replace fragmented and largely paper-based processes with a more coordinated digital system. When operational, BPAS is intended to allow applications and plans to be submitted online, provide digital records and application tracking, and support more coordinated assessment by the agencies involved. Preparatory works has included system development, testing, stakeholder engagement, training, onboarding, and the standardisation of council processes.

Parliament passed amendments to the Town Planning Framework in November 2025 to support digital building permit processing. The related regulations are still being processed. BPAS is expected to be rolled out once these close regulations have received legal clearance from the Office of the Solicitor-General.

This reform, Madam Deputy Speaker, is also supported by the digitisation of Town and Country Planning records. The Department holds more than 74,000 physical files, including building, subdivision, and rezoning records dating back to the 1960s. More than 2,500 records have been scanned to date. The purpose is to improve access to information, assessment applications, and evidence-based decision-making.

The Ministry is also looking beyond building permits. Early planning work has commenced towards the future digitisation of subdivision and rezoning applications, with the intention that these services can progressively move to digital platforms once the necessary systems, processes, and legal requirements are in place.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these digital reforms must also be supported by modern planning law. Government has progressed amendments to the Town Planning Act and related development control legislation to improve consistency, support digital processes, and strengthen the administration of development applications, and sustainability and resilience are central to this work.

In 2024, the Cabinet approved the development of National Blue Town Framework to guide more sustainable township development. Fiji's urban centres face flooding, coastal hazards, extreme rainfall, and pressure on ageing infrastructure. The planning must, therefore, identify these risks clearly, and coordinate land use, infrastructure and development controls before problems become difficult and costly to address.

The core principle behind this work is simple: we must plan ahead. The National Development Plan envisages that by 2050, at least 70 percent of Fijians will be living in urban centres. The decisions we make now will, therefore, shape the quality and resilience of our towns and cities for decades to come.

Our objective is not simply to create larger towns and cities. It is to ensure that homes, businesses, roads, drainage, water, wastewater, transport, and public facilities are planned together so that Fiji's urban centres are safer, better connected, more resilient and sustainable for the people who live and work in them.

Implementation of the Reviewed National Employment Policy (Question No. 227/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, and Acting Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations update Parliament on the finalisation and implementation timeframe of the reviewed National Employment Policy?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, allow me to provide this august House with an update on the progress of the review. The key priorities contain the draft policy and the anticipated timeframe for its finalisation and implementation.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge and thank the International Labour Organisation (ILO), for the technical and financial assistance provided since the commencement of this review. I also acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Government ministries and agencies, the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation, the Fiji Trade Union Congress, Civil Society Organisations, training institutions, and other stakeholders who have contributed towards the development of the Draft National Employment Policy.

Overview of the Draft National Employment Policy: Madam Deputy Speaker, the draft policy identified eight key priority areas, supported by a number of sub-priority actions. Given the cross-cutting nature of employment, implementation of these priorities will require close coordination and collaboration between Government ministries and agencies, employers, workers' organisations, training institutions, and civil society. Allow me to briefly outline the eight priority areas:

- (1) Improving job quality to enhance productivity
This priority focuses on improving the quality of employment and strengthening productivity through better work-life balance, improved occupational health and safety standards, and greater compliance with labour laws through effective labour inspections. It also promotes a right-based approach to economic and social development, guided by international labour standards and the principle of bipartisanship.
- (2) Strengthening education and skills development
This priority focuses on building a skilled and empowered workforce, ensuring that education and training systems are better aligned with labour market needs. It also promotes lifelong learning and continued skills development, both within and outside the workplace.
- (3) Strengthening the formalising Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME)
This priority aims to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of MSMEs, particularly in important sectors such as agriculture and tourism. It also promotes entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic empowerment and supports the transition of informal economic activities into the formal economy.
- (4) Empowering vulnerable groups
This priority promotes inclusive employment policies and targeted programmes for women, youth, persons with disabilities, older workers, and people living in remote communities. The objective is to improve their access to decent employment opportunities and strengthen their participation in economic activity.
- (5) Ensuring fair and beneficial labour migration
This priority focus on ensuring that both inward and outward labour migration is fair, sustainable, and rights based. It also recognises the importance of effectively reintegrating returning migrant workers so that Fiji can benefit from skills, knowledge and experience they have gained abroad.
- (6) Facilitating a just transition to climate resilience and green, blue economy and a sustainable society
This priority recognises the link between employment, climate resilience and sustainable

development. It seeks to create decent employment opportunities through transition towards green and blue economy and promotes employment-intensive approaches to post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. If I may just emphasise. Part of the recommendations or what has been wanted by the ministry to be in the ERB is in relation to this.

(7) Leveraging digitalisation, artificial intelligence for future-ready jobs

This priority recognises the increasing impact of technology on the world of work. It seeks to harness opportunities presented by digitalisation and emerging forms of Artificial Intelligence to support decent, inclusive, future-ready employment while also addressing potential challenges such as workforce displacement.

(8) Strengthening of labour market information.

This priority focuses on ensuring that timely, reliable and accessible labour market information is available to Government and other stakeholders. This information will support research, policy development, monitoring and evaluation, and evidence-based decision-making. A key component of this priority is the establishment of the Comprehensive Labour Market Information Systems, or LMIS.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is really a whole-of-government implementation approach. The National Employment Policy is therefore not intended to be implemented by the Ministry of Employment alone. Given the broad range of issues covered by the policy, its implementation will adopt a whole-of-government approach, with the relevant ministries and agencies taking responsibility for leading and supporting the priority and sub priority areas that fall within their respective mandates.

This approach will also require continued engagement with the employers, workers' organisations, training institutions, civil society and other key stakeholders. Some updates on the review and finalisation progress. In terms of the current status of the review, the draft national employment policy is presently being considered by the technical subcommittee. The committee last met, last July, and is currently reviewing feedback received on the revised draft. The next major step will be the presentation of the Draft National Employment Policy to the National Employment Centre Board in November of this year.

Following consideration by the board, the Draft Policy will be submitted to the Solicitor-General's Office for necessary legal vetting and clearance. Once legal clearance has been obtained the Policy will then proceed to the development sub-committee before being submitted to Cabinet for consideration approval.

Madam Deputy Speaker, subject to the completion of these processes and Cabinet approval, the Government expects implementation of the Reviewed National Employment Policy to commence before the end of the current financial year. The Government remains committed to ensuring that the final policy provides a coordinated, inclusive, and practical framework for addressing Fiji's current and future employment priorities.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Are there any follow-up questions? I see there are none. Honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for elaborating on the National Employment Policy. I am glad to see that it is now going through its second iteration of this policy. As I was there at the development of the initial policy, looking at the various priorities that they have talked about, decent work, reliable LMI or the Labour Management Information System, training and skills development, strengthen MSMEs, empower vulnerable groups, ensure fair and sustainable

inward and outward migration and just transition to green and sustainable development.

I am very interested to know, you are developing the policies. After the policy, there will come a plan and there will come programmes to implement the policy. In terms of the last priority that you have, just an invitation to green and sustainable development, does the Ministry have any indication of how well in the past from the first employment policy, which was there from, I cannot remember when, probably 2016, how well they have managed that transition to green and sustainable development and what they intend to do in that particular area. This is just one of the six areas that you have highlighted.

HON. S.D. TURAGA. - The Government, through the former minister and I, through the deputy prime minister, have been engaged with the committee, trying to impress on the committee the importance of the climate. Cook Island is the only country in the region that has it. So, for example, for any displacement pursuant to climate change, what ILO wants is that it is covered in the Act, and there is funding provided for that.

I understand for Cook Islands, \$9 million has been provided. So that is really a necessity, and it is really with the committee, and we hope that come November, the ER will be brought back, and that provision will be part of it.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. When you talk about green, you are talking about green productivity, which means rather than relying on the formal way in which you look at productivity, where you look at a lot of formal sector things that lead to a lot of emissions, the emphasis to move from those kinds of jobs to green productivity jobs in which there are fewer emissions. So my question is precisely on that.

When you talk about green productivity, green jobs, how well has the ministry been able to do that, to keep people, to grow people in the green productivity jobs? Where are we right now, and what do we intend to achieve in that particular area?

HON. S.D. TURAGA. - Madam Deputy Speaker, I have outline that the processes will be considered by the board before it goes to the development committee, then to Cabinet. I am unable to, well, I would not be able to understand, really explain to you, but that is the process. I can further highlight to you in the next sitting of Parliament.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you. Thank you, honourable Minister. Honourable Members, we will now take a break, but before I do, I want you to join me in warmly welcoming Mr. Krishnil Sen, Mr. Isoa Nabainivalu, Ms. Melita Cook, and Mrs. Jill Temo from the Fiji Association of the Deaf, to Parliament this morning and their interpreters, Claudette Wilson and Patricia Miller.

Your presence here today is a valued opportunity to strengthen engagement between Parliament and members of the Deaf community so as to enhance greater inclusivity and accessibility within our parliamentary process. I warmly welcome you to your Parliament, and we thank you for coming today.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for a break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.33 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.15 a.m.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, would you, please, join me in welcoming a cohort of Law students from the University of the South Pacific. Welcome to your Parliament and I hope that today's proceedings will give you some enlightenment to the workings of your Parliament.

National iTaukei Resource Owners Council
(Question No. 228/2026)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Information, and Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on the initiatives undertaken through the National iTaukei Resource Owners Council to support iTaukei communities in climate resilience, adaptation, and prudent environmental management?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I answer the question, I would like to join the honourable Prime Minister and Members of the House to also express my sincerest condolences on the passing of the honourable Agni Deo Singh as well as honourable Inosi Kuridrani. I have many memories of both Members serving in the House, and I also express my condolences to the families and may they rest in peace.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the National iTaukei Resource Owners Council sits under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, and it is chaired by the Permanent Secretary. Its work includes cultural mapping programmes which document the tangible and intangible heritage of our communities and help safeguard it against loss and damage from climate impacts. The role of our ministry is through the National Resource Owners Committee (NROC) established under the Environment Management Act. The NROC Committee advises on environmental matters affecting resource owners' natural resources.

The Ministry provides the Committee's technical and coordinating support, strengthening resource owners' participation in environmental decision-making. That support gives effect to parts of the Act which requires recognition of the relationship of *iTaukei* with their ancestral lands, waters, sites, sacred areas and other treasures and regard for the traditional owners or guardians of resources.

There is an annual budgetary allocation of \$100,000 and the Ministry convenes capacity-building and awareness trainings for resource owners across all four divisions, followed by a national ANROC meeting of representatives from the 14 provinces and relevant stakeholders.

In each national meeting, we agree to resolutions and assign them to responsible agencies and ministries, which report back at the next meeting. The most recent meeting was in March this year, which reviewed the progress of the May 2025 resolutions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me give the House five examples of what this has delivered:

- (1) A stronger voice in development decisions
The Committee's request, the ministry held Environmental Impact Assessment sessions at the Cogea Village in Bua last November and Waiqanake Village in Rewa in March, reaching nearly 80 communities.
- (2) Enforcement on the Ground
In line with the committee's resolution, all 14 provincial conservation officers have been

appointed as prevention officers amongst the 374 other public officers that have been appointed since 2024. So, every province has an officer able to enforce the Litters Act as amended.

(3) Waste Management In Our Villages

Awareness programmes in Bua, Macuata, Ba and Cakaudrove have distributed 91 compost bins to 35 villages and composting training under the Jeff Islands project is being extended to 25 communities in 10 provinces.

(4) Consent and Traditional Knowledge

The NROC members from Ba, Ra, Bua, Lomaiviti and Macuata have been engaged in every consultation on the National Action Plan for Coral Reef Conservation, on the committee's own condition that awareness come first and consent be obtained. The access and benefit sharing policy which was launched in May this year, will further safeguard traditional knowledge and the rights of resource-owning communities.

(5) Climate resilience and adaptation interventions

At the March meeting this year, the ministry briefed members on Fiji's third nationally determined contributions and second national adaptation plan and took their questions, including on the risks of carbon trading. The NDCs were submitted in November last year and the second iteration of Fiji's NAPs are currently being finalised.

Madam Deputy Speaker, *iTaukei* communities own the majority of land and as resource owners, are custodians of our history, heritage and identity. Our ministry remains committed to working with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the iTaukei Affairs Board and relevant agencies so that *iTaukei* communities have the support and the voice to manage their resources sustainably.

HON. N.T.TUINACEVA.- Can the Minister confirm if the NROC will be participating in the Pre-COP next week? If they do, can you clarify which areas they will be participating in.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A very important question. As Fiji prepares to host pre-COP, the voices of our Indigenous peoples must be at the centre of Fiji's climate action. The NROC remains the main platform through which *iTaukei* resource owners shape that action.

As I mentioned in the March meeting, resource owners from all 14 provinces were briefed by the Ministry on preparations for pre-COP. The committee also asked that those who represent our communities at international meetings bring back what they hear to the *Vanua*.

The pre-COP stakeholder programme, called Vale ni Vanua, the Knowledge Exchange, is open to Indigenous organisations and community groups from across the Pacific. This means traditional knowledge and community-led solutions will stand alongside the negotiations. The *Vanua o Nadi* holds a special place in this. In August, it hosted the Pacific Regional gathering of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, which Fiji secured at COP30.

When pre-COP opens in Nadi in five days, Yasawa's first female *Mata ni Tikina* will update Leaders on its outcomes at the opening plenary. Fiji will then carry those outcomes forward to COP31 in Antalya. We hope the Vanua Nadi and resource owners across Fiji will use pre-COP to amplify the issues raised through the NROC. These include waste in our villages, proper consultation on development, the health of our rivers, reefs, and *qoliqoli* and the protection of traditional knowledge. The world should hear directly from those who own and care for our land and sea.

Policy Initiatives and Infrastructural Support - Cane Growers
(Question No. 229/2026)

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

Can the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on the specific policy initiatives or infrastructural support being provided to assist cane growers with escalating production costs, particularly concerning farm gate fertiliser and fuel pricing?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the sugar industry is operating in an increasingly challenging global economic environment, and the rise in international fuel prices disrupts the global supply chain, and increased input costs have placed considerable pressure on farmers, harvesting contractors, and the wider agriculture sector. The challenge for the Government is, therefore, to manage the domestic impact of this development while ensuring continuation of essential farming operations like sugar harvesting and transportation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government introduced measures to provide assistance to canegrowers. These interventions are aimed at reducing cost of production, supporting harvesting and transportation operations. One of the major interventions undertaken by the Government is the fertiliser subsidy programme, and the Government covers approximately 68.4 percent of the cost of subsidised bags of fertiliser.

From our current agreement, the total cost of a bag of fertiliser is around \$63.34 per bag, and of this amount, the Government provides a subsidy of \$43.34, while the farmer contributes only \$20 a bag. This support is particularly important to our smallholder farmers who have limited capacity to absorb increases in the input costs. Those profitable is often affected by the relatively low production volume.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the second major intervention is the Government-funded fuel subsidy programme, which was mentioned yesterday. The Government has allocated \$5 million, inclusive of VAT, for the 2026 harvest season to support the fuel-related costs across the Lautoka, Rarawai, and Labasa Mill.

As of the latest report, approximately \$3.89 million has been incurred under the programme. This demonstrates the substantial level of assistance directed towards maintaining harvesting and transportation operations during the 2026 season.

The other government-supported programmes continue to provide important support towards cane, and this includes transportation subsidies, mechanical harvesting, tractor and rail operations, locomotive fuel usage, manual harvesting assistance, grants on infrastructure upgrading, assistance on crop diversification, government-assisted financial assistance through the Sugar Cane Growers Fund and FSC. The above assistance helps to cushion the impact of rising fuel costs and our canegrowers and harvesting contractors.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government will continue to support the sugar industry during the period of considerable global economic uncertainty. It is already rolling out programmes that will address and mitigate the Super El Nino phenomenon. For this financial year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways, and Sugar Industry has a budget of \$221 million. The sugar industry alone has a budget of \$96 million, and that is 43 percent of the whole of the agriculture sector budget. The 43 percent only one crop and that is why diversification is the way forward.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, there was provisions to supply back the sugarcane by-products, meal mud, ashes back to all farmers to reduce fertiliser requirement and increase soil fertility. Majority of the farmers are not being assisted through this. My question is why and how soon it can be revived.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- The resupply of waste from the mills I believe have been discussed in a number of meetings with FSC in our current consultation and it comes with the cost to FSC which they are reviewing and trying to address and the different ways the Government can assist providing that much assisted requirement in the sugarcane farmers. I believe there are recommendations on how we will address them.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, a follow-up question regarding the escalating production cost and obviously the condition of the mill in which I posed to the honourable Minister yesterday and maybe a follow-up from that one as well to the honourable Minister, the European Union you said is being involved, part of the discussion with some funds to upgrade the mill, but are you talking to any other donor partners, any private sector to invest into the mill upgrades, or is it just the European Union? If that is the case, then that does not show much political will in trying to improve our FSC and mill operations.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, there have been a lot of discussions with a lot of other partners, even including Wilmar and Goodman Fielder, and this is for the use of organic fertiliser from the refuge, we have from markets and the hotel industry. There is quite a big move into discussing how we can use that as part of assistance given to the industry. This is to work with those who can provide fertiliser using locally available ingredients, which would be cheaper and would also address escalating prices that we get when there are disturbances outside Fiji.

Monitoring and Compliance - Mining and Quarrying Operations
(Question No. 230/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on the measures undertaken to strengthen the monitoring and compliance of mining and quarrying operations in Fiji?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Ratu Josaia Niudamu for the question that he has raised in the House this morning. He has asked the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources what we are doing to strengthen monitoring and compliance in all mining and quarry operations throughout Fiji.

I will give this House a clear answer, Madam Deputy Speaker, but before I do that, I join you in welcoming and acknowledging the law students from the University of the South Pacific to Parliament today. The USP, I am sure, holds a very special place for most of us. I was also a part of the law study at the University of the South Pacific and taught criminal law there, as well as honourable Tabuya, who had taught in the PDLF programme. I wish all the law students joining us here today the very best in their lifetime endeavour.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a problem with the old system, which unfortunately remains our current system for mining monitoring and compliance in Fiji. Our current system relies on a periodic paper-based reporting system. This simply means that inspectors receive information after something has happened, and not while it is happening or has just happened. We all understand that, in industries like this, that is not good enough. The spill in the Tuvatu Mine last year, or the year

before is a perfect example of why our monitoring and compliance systems need to be upgraded. The paper-based reporting system cannot stop, Madam Deputy Speaker, a dam from failing, and it cannot prevent contamination of rivers. Thus, it cannot protect the village that exists downstream.

What have we done? We have changed the system. The Mines Division of the MRD is moving from a periodic paper-based reporting to a continuous data-driven regulation, and this is what it means in plain terms:

- (1) We are piloting a real-time monitoring for tailing storage facilities. It is integrated with the MRD, or the department's GIS mining dashboard, and it is – I would report – progressing very well. What does the real-time monitoring system contain? The real-time monitoring system is currently being piloted together with Lion One Metals Limited and Tuvatu Mine using sensors. These are piezometers, to continue monitoring dam facility and share those data to the mine manager in real-time. Once the system is finalised, it will become accessible to the mine inspectors and MRD in real-time. These matters because inspectors, rather than wait for time reporting to happen, will now have current information and not after-the-fact reports. They can see what is happening at these mines, or at the quarries, in real-time and not what has happened last month.
- (2) We are upgrading the reporting requirements for exploration and mining licences to international recognised standards in digital form. Why does this matter? As one would assume in this House, that every dollar that we publicly commit to expenditure, will have to be reconciled against the work that is performed on the ground. We have also introduced a Standard Operating Procedure for Minerals Export Permit 2025. It verifies sampling and grades, which underpins then the accuracy or the correctness of the royalties that are assessed. If the grades are wrong, the royalty is wrong, and if the royalty is wrong, the landowners who are entitled to those royalties will get less.
- (3) Data from the relinquished tenements, SPLs that have not been renewed or have been relinquished, is now retained by the State, and is released only open file once the confidentiality agreements between those who held SPLs and the government collapses. It builds Fiji's geological information base. It reduces risk for future investors, and it means the next exploration programme does not have to start from scratch.
- (4) Stronger legal foundation. The governing legislation is currently under review. This review will strengthen inspection and enforcement powers. It will extend express protection to inspectors who are currently carrying out their duties in these mines and quarries. They will make dealings transparent, and transfer and registration of interests will have to be clear and accountable. They will establish the legal basis for digital and real-time reporting. The regulator will have the power, the information and the legal standing that it needs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, three measures are central here, as follows:

- (1) Preventative intervention. This is what the MRD will continue to do. We will continue to monitor scaling storage now with real-time facility or capability and strengthening our inspectors through mandated powers. The regulators at MRD can step in and fix issues before an incident occurs, rather than to respond after the damages have been done.
- (2) Mining companies must restore environment continually throughout the life of their operation. They do not have to wait until the mine has come to a completion and the mining life is expired, so that the mining company that is still is earning and should still be restoring

the environment around them.

- (3) There is now going to be an extended responsibility to closure. When a mine is closed, the obligation remains in place even though productivity has lapsed. Accountability will continue until the land is fully and properly restored.

There is a lesson, Madam Deputy Speaker, we must not forget. There is a story of Vatukoula that is over 90 years old now. Tuvatu Gold Mine just coming to four years in its lifetime, there is Mount Kasi start, stop, start, stop, and it is now in exploration mode again and a big one with Kalo Mines up in Labasa.

What I am suggesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the names that I have just mentioned are not just mining sites, they also contain communities that have built their lives around this industry and they have taught us a lesson that when the mining stops, the environmental and the community responsibility should not stop with it. A company may close and a licence may lapse. A mine shaft may go quiet, but the obligation should remain. That is the principle that guides everything that I have outlined to this House.

When the new Mineral Exploration and Mining Bill comes to this House in November, you will see a holistic regime, a set of new laws that govern from before exploration starts to post-closure of mines and quarries. Even real time monitoring, the one that I have just said, which is a proposed in between the current outdated legislation to the new one, that will now become part of statute, where monitoring and surveillance at real time of critical mine operations and infrastructure is provided under the Smart Mining Division of the new Bill. This is one of the outcomes that the review team has come up with after visitation in both Papua New Guinea and after study tour and training that had been provided by the Korean government to MRD civil servants.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me summarise. We are moving from paper to data, from periodic being continuous, from after the fact to real life, from a regulator that reacts to a regulator that anticipates that these things might happen and they have the capability to attend to them.

In the end, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are anchoring all of these in law with stronger powers, protected inspectors, transparent dealings and enforceable obligation that outlasts the mine itself. Free prior informed consent is required from before exploration to post closure. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would suggest is true partnership in this industry. The landowners are involved, and brings equity, fairness, and we are doing what is right. And this House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would suggest that our job is to make sure that when minerals are extracted, the laws are passed that ensures that value is shared environment is protected, and our accountability to the public and to us.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Is there a follow-up question?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I will narrate the question to the honourable Minister for around what I heard. Honourable Minister, when it said that these tracking companies would pay off someone in a community, just one person, and they are able to dig up rivers for sand, river rock, et cetera. How would your Ministry monitor these kinds of acts?

The second question to that is, how well are you coordinated with the Ministry of Environment and how you assess the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) reports to ensure that these companies are compliant? The issue with the Ministry of Environment, they have been issuing non-compliant certificates to certain businesses for polluting the environment, yet they do not have a strict law where they can put a heavy penalty. There are two parts to the question. One is how some people in the communities are exploited over a few dollars, digging up rivers or rocks, and the non-

compliance aspect with the Ministry of Environment.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, let me answer the first part of the question asked by the honourable Member. There are obviously people who follow the law and those that do not. There are quarry companies and people who follow the process. They come to the Ministry of Lands, they apply or they go to iTLTB, they apply and they would get a licence. There are the opportunists. They would often find that there is a good, healthy sand bank somewhere, good, healthy river gravel somewhere and they would come to the village, they would entice them, most quite likely to be off grid, not quite easily seen, their activities are not always monitored. Those are the ones that we capture when things have happened and done. When we follow up and say, “somebody, the *turaga ni koro* or someone has given express approval” and they have taken a couple of thousand cubic meters of sand and gravel. That is going to be dealt with in the new Bill that is before the special Committee, we are going to introduce it in November.

The other part is in relation to our collaboration with the Ministry of Environment. I would say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that again, when I spoke about this new holistic Bill that we are going to be introducing, it is going to be coming out of everything that we have experienced since 1965 when the old laws were introduced. So, experientially, in the last 20 years we have encountered all of these kinds of shady businesses going on the side, enforcements not proper, compliance is not proper, as well as detection. All of these are going to be part of the new Bill and I am sure that when it comes out, we give it teeth, we give it funding, it should be able to do all that it needs to make sure that our environment is protected environmentally.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Koya, do you have another supplementary question?

HON. F.S. KOYA.-Honourable Minister, in light of what you have just explained to us, will you be incorporating a system whereby every single load of gravel, whether it is from a quarry or from an extracted site, is actually going to be certified, so that then, there is a piece of paper and a trail with respect to where you received it from? The receiving part of it then becomes an offence also, that if you have not received it and you cannot certify it, will you implement some system of that particular sort, where the loads are actually certified and stamped?

If it has come out of a particular, let us say, for example, a river or quarry, it has to be properly certified. It is like the timber, how they do the mahogany. If it is not certified, it is illegal. Will you be looking at some kind of system like that?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- This is why I said yesterday that the Members on the other side are truly underestimating my friend. He has a lot of knowledge about things; he should be consulted a lot more. Honourable Usamate and honourable Ketan Lal should learn from him.

(Laughter)

But sure enough, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know the exact details of the regime that is under the new proposed Bill, but you certainly have given me an idea. I am sure that we will have some chat this afternoon and then I will carry it with the team that is doing the review.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, you mentioned about monitoring the tailings and how it is affecting the environment, et cetera. A question is more related to gravel extraction or quarrying for that matter. The monitoring of the hydrological flow. As a former Minister for Disaster Management, this is one of the contributing factors to riverbank erosion. When you do extraction, the velocity of the flow increases. I just wanted to ask this question because Suweni Village in Cakaudrove had to undergo a lot of mitigation because of this. Five houses were taken away by the hydrological flow

because of gravel extraction downstream from Korotari River. How is this hydrological flow monitored under this arrangement?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- You see, this is the reason, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the honourable Leader of the Opposition understands more about Vanua Levu and Cakaudrove than his own Province.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have mentioned about how this new Bill is being developed, so experience has been incorporated, science is going to be incorporated. We are to going ensure that the experience of Fiji, even with hydrological flow in our rivers, the over extraction of our rivers, sands and gravel admittedly, all quarry companies that are given licences in one way shape or form, do not follow the volumetric that is given to them.

Sometimes three months down the line, we do an inspection, we will find that some of them have over extracted and some of them have under extracted. This is where, we are going to have to blend our experience and put it into the law as well as the science that is required to ensure that when extraction happens, these sorts of things that happens in the secondary does not happen again. The experience in Suweni was really a bad one and it is something that we do not anticipate, and we make sure that it does not happen again.

Plans to Upgrade the Nadi to Lautoka Highway
(Question No. 231/2026)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I even ask my question I must declare my interest. I am from the West, born and bred in Lautoka. This question does not just come from that perspective, also from the thousands of travellers between Nadi and Lautoka.

My question is:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on plans to upgrade the Nadi to Lautoka Highway?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Nadi to Lautoka corridor is a strategically important route within Fiji's road network. It connects Nadi International Airport, major tourism and commercial areas in Nadi with Lautoka Port and the industrial commercial, then of course, residential areas of Lautoka, Fiji's second largest urban centre. Previous assessments undertaken by the Fiji Roads Authority identified increasing traffic demand, significant land use development, along the corridor and road safety concerns based on available data.

Traffic forecasts also indicate that continued development and population growth will place increasing pressure on the existing road capacity. The long-term strategy provides for stage upgrading of Queen's Road including four-laning between Nasoso and Navutu roundabout area together with strategic alignments and bypasses around Sabeto, Fiji National University, Lawaki and Lomolomo. The proposed upgrading also includes an appropriate intersection strategy, including roundabouts at major intersections, traffic signals where pedestrian demand warrants and the left-in left-out arrangements at selected minor intersections.

The intention is to implement these improvements progressively based on traffic growth, development patterns, road safety requirements and the availability of funding. Annual traffic monitoring will therefore remain important to ensure that implementation priorities and timing align with the actual traffic demand.

In terms of the current programme, FRA is progressing the following key components; Nadi-Lautoka Queen's Road upgrade, the consultancy contract for the detailed investigation design of approximately 20.3 kilometres of Queen's Road from Nasoso junction to Navutu has been awarded and this work begins in October 2026.

For the Queen's Road, Sikituru Road, and Denarau Road bypass, as you are coming towards Nadi, past the Moala junction, just near the corner, FRA will commence the procurement process for consultancy services, further investigation and design for the strategic bypass component. That will connect to the Denarau Road bypass via Sikituru which is just past Narewa. The tender will be advertised in October 2026.

The FRA is progressing with the construction of the new Sabeto and Viseisei bridges. This is under the Critical Bridge Resilience Project funded by the Asian Development Bank and World Bank. The contracts are targeted for award by November 2026. The long-term upgrading package has previously been estimated at approximately \$300 million including professional fees, construction, land requirements, acquisition and contingency. As I mentioned, it is intended to be implemented progressively over the next three to ten years, subject to the design funding availability procurement and project readiness.

These investments are intended to progressively increase capacity, improve road capacity and resilience, and improve the efficiency of the corridor. The FRA will continue to monitor traffic growth and network performance as we move forward with the detailed engineering investigations, and of course, the funding component which needs to be planned, and working closely with the Ministry of Finance. I know you have raised the debt level, but of course, that is an essential component for any developing country on infrastructure development as we move forward.

For your information, in terms of timelines, investigation and design normally takes six months, the tender procurement for civil works takes three months and the actual mobilisation by the contractor for the work to start after that tender procurement and procurement for civil works at the end of the three months.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- They are all from the West via Labasa.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I thank you for your answer. I see that you have dealt with, from Sikituru, Denarau Road, also from Nasoso right through to Navutu, but you have completely left out one of the main roads but is now a hugely problematic area which is the Nadi Back Road. Is there something in the plans with respect to that?

If I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, the reality is that you will have an hour's journey just on the Back Road, getting in and out of Nadi during peak hour. It is a problem for bus transport companies and people going that way and even if you are trying to get to the airport on peak hour, it is actually quite ridiculous. You have left out the Nadi Back Road, is that part also of the actual plan because it would be important if it is?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So for the Nadi Back Road, that is currently, I suppose, we could say problematic at the moment given there needs to be a turn off junctions created. That is what FRA is working on in terms of widening that. There is a turn off in terms where the culvert areas need to be improved and widened. That is also currently being assessed and costed, and it is a part of the progressive work as we move forward.

In terms of Nawaka traffic lights, there are indications that it would be more efficient to put a roundabout there, that is currently being worked on. The right turn and left turn into the arterial roads are the ones where we need to create spaces for the turn off vehicles and that is currently the area which is being worked on. Of course, speeding is one of the main issues. A lot of vehicles are falling into the ditches at the corners just because of over speeding. We need to put more cameras there as we move forward, not humps but cameras.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Honourable Minister, you told Parliament in March 2023 that the feasibility study for the Nadi-Lautoka Four-Lane Highway was continuing. Can you explain why sections of the Nadi-Lautoka Highway develop potholes and surface failures immediately after repairs? Has FRA investigated or whether the problem is the quality of the workmanship, drainage, or inadequate maintenance?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Again, this is an example of a generalised type of question. Atypical phrase is, there are potholes all over the place. Can you tell me where the potholes are?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Everywhere!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Generally, there is a programme for identification and repairs of potholes. That is currently being followed in the maintenance programme which is budgeted for.

HON. H. CHAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I ask my supplementary question, I would like to declare my interest. The people of Vuda have been raising concerns on the poor condition of Vuda Reservoir Road. Last week the honourable Assistant Minister visited and met with the people of Vuda, and I would like to thank the Assistant Minister for that. My question is, are there any plans to upgrade Vuda Reservoir Road in this financial year?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Definitely, all these roads are included in the upgrading and maintenance plan. That is something that is part of the ongoing programme maintenance. Ideally, we all want the roads to be perfect, tarsealed with footpaths, et cetera. We can dream about it, but we can also plan. As you can see, when we came in, FRA was virtually bankrupt in December 2022. There was no money there, we had to acquire \$15 million overdraft from HFC to have FRA continue to operate. The contractors were not paid.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- What is your Point of Order, honourable Usamate?

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Minister's answers are irrelevant. The question is about Vuda. He is talking about everything else except Vuda. So, all these things he is saying are completely irrelevant.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Ro Tuisawau, have you finished your reply to honourable Chand?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Not yet.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Do carry on, but please make your reply relevant.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Why I am saying this because it is relevant to the current situation. Once we fix that, then we put in place strategic plans not only for FRA ...

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Please, sit down, honourable Usamate. We will get this over and done with very shortly.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... assess the internal processes, including the tenders and monitoring. We have strategic plans not only for the roads, privatisation, but also for financing. I have a Ministerial Statement on how we move forward. We will win the elections, so we are already planning the infrastructure for the next four years, eight years, up until 16 years, just like you had.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister has spoken about various projects, strategic plan, access to funding. My question is looking at how the Semo Bridge has been looked after, in fact, quite a disaster. Allegations of a bailey bridge concept has costed FRA hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The question to the honourable Minister is when he wants to progress with all these funds, finance from abroad, I guess from donor agencies, does FRA have the right set of engineers? Does it even have a board that listens to the engineers so that we do not incur these kinds of losses, what we see with Semo Bridge, it is still a disaster, with the other projects in the Nadi to Lautoka Highway area that you had proposed.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, Semo Bridge I think is the main question.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It is totally a new question. I am not sure whether I should answer it or not.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, please honourable Members!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That specific question is in the Order Paper for Friday. We can address it then, but I think you are making allegations about corruption and all that which are really unsubstantiated. You cannot make that without any evidence.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- If you make allegations, present the evidence.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Address the Chair, honourable Member!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- You can be sued by myself or honourable Charan Jeath Singh.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- But yes, as I mentioned, in terms of the skills issues we have, yes definitely that is an ongoing issue and we continue to face those problems, especially within the technical sectors of government - engineers, technicians, surveyors, architects. We will continue to face this problem and that is currently also an impediment within the Ministry. When we look back, how did that happen? A lot of reasons can be traced back to the removal of Public Works Department by the last government.

If we had not done that, we would have had this cadre of technicians within government, within the control of government. Not only that but the succession was there for them. The apprentices linking up to FNU and all that. Once we cut that off, it is like restarting the whole process again in terms of skilled technical manpower for this country. That is the process we are undergoing at the moment. I am not blaming anyone but that is the situation at the moment, which is why this

Government needs to go on for another 16 years.

Integrated Tourism Master Plan - Na Vualiku Programme
(Question No. 232/2026)

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament on what the Integrated Tourism Master Plan prepared under the Na Vualiku Programme indicate about the future of tourism in the Northern Division over the next 25 years?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The Integrated Tourism Master Plan for Vanua Levu and Taveuni is the first integrated tourism master plan the North has ever had. It is being prepared under the Na Vualiku Programme, financed by the World Bank, by international joint venture of specialist firms, working on Terms of Reference cleared by the Bank and supervised by my Ministry.

It is a 17-month exercise, looking 25 years ahead to 2050. It has been built from the ground, ground-up. In February this year, the consultants held visiting workshops in Labasa, Savusavu, Nabouwalu, and Taveuni, with provincial and tradition leaders, landowners, tourism operators, businesses and communities and what was shared in those rooms has shaped what the plan recommends.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when it is complete, it will give the North, for the first time:

- (1) spatial plan that says where tourism should go and where it should not;
- (2) costed pipeline of the infrastructure that growth depends on;
- (3) strategy for the markets and the products that suit the North; and
- (4) set of measures against which this House can judge progress year by year.

Let me begin with where the North stands today, because the House should judge the plan against the facts. The Northern Division receives about 72,000 tourism arrivals a year, roughly half from overseas and half from within Fiji. It has 948 rooms in 116 licenced establishments, and on average, those rooms are occupied one night in three. Around 118,000 passengers a year fly into Labasa, Savusavu and Matei, so the airports are there but they are small and limit what can grow.

The visitors who do come are the right ones: divers drawn to the Rainbow Reef and Namena, yachts, nature and adventure travellers, honeymooners and those who come for the hot springs and for wellness, and they spend on an average around \$4,000 a trip, which is a high yield visitor by any standard. The Bureau of Statistics tells us that the population of the Division has been falling, from just under 140,000 in 1996 census to under 132,000 at the 2017 census.

We have in the North, the finest reefs, forests and rivers in Fiji, a tourism economy that is a fraction of what those assets could support, and a division that has been losing its people. That is the problem this Plan is written to solve. The consultants modelled the pathways to 2050, from doing nothing at one end to transformational growth at the other, and tested each of them for feasibility, economic return, environmental and social impacts and the infrastructure it would need. They recommend the second of the five, which they call expanded, but managed development.

In plain terms, the airports we have improved; the towns we have properly served with water, wastewater, waste management and energy; new rooms at the upper end of the market rather than

the mass tourism; and growth held within what the reefs and forests can bear. It comes with a defined list of what must be built:

- (1) major improvement to the airport at Matei in Taveuni and to Savusavu airports;
- (2) South Coast Road on Taveuni and the roads East and West of Labasa;
- (3) wastewater, electricity and communications in Savusavu, Labasa and Taveuni;
- (4) moorings around Taveuni, Savusavu, Bua and Labasa, and better jetties at Savusavu and Taveuni for the yachts and the dive boats;
- (5) training centre in Savusavu for the tourism workforce and a marine centre on Taveuni; and
- (6) destination management organisation for the North to hold it all together.

The choice of pathway rests with the Government, and we will bring it to Cabinet when the Plan is complete. Under that pathway, the Plan's modelling indicates arrivals into the North in the order of 130,000 a year by 2050, nearly twice today's level, with the growth coming mainly from international visitors who stay longer and spend more.

Today, about half of our visitors are international; by 2050, out of this pathway, nearly two-thirds would be with Australia and New Zealand, the fastest-growing markets and the U.S and the new markets are alongside them because we want to grow in value and not in volume. Community-based tourism, where villages host visitors on their own terms, almost doubles. Today, tourism spending in the North is estimated at around \$290 million a year. By 2050, the modelling indicates a tourism economy in the North of the order of \$1 billion a year. I give the House those figures on what the Plan's modelling indicates. What will it take? The communities in the North were clear in every workshop that they do not want rapid, uncontrolled growth.

The words they used for the North, they want in 2050 were sustainable, regenerative, inclusive, authentic and community driven. And in everyone in those rooms, water, sanitation and connectivity sat at the top of the list of what must come first. From that, the communities set four principles for the consultants and the Plan is built on them:

- (1) value ahead of volume - community ownership and participation;
- (2) protection of the natural and cultural assets on which everything else depends;
- (3) infrastructure first; and
- (4) with water, wastewater, waste energy and connectivity in places before or alongside growth, never after it.

The last principle is why this programme looks unhurried from the outside. Private investors do not build where there is no water, no wastewater treatment and no reliable access. The Government's role is to put those foundations in place first. And that is exactly what Na Vualiku is doing now, in this first phase, with the financing of the World Bank.

On access, the Labasa, Savusavu and Taveuni airports are being upgraded. Fiji Airports has the engineers engaged and the designs are being prepared, so that the improvements at both airports can go to construction as soon as the designs are complete. And the studies to establish whether a new airport for Vanua Levu is feasible, and how far Savusavu Airport can be expanded are proceeding at the same time.

On the road, the Fiji Roads Authority has invited tenders for the design and supervision of the Cross-Island Road project between Labasa and Savusavu. With four scenic lookout points along the way, and that firm will be at work before the end of this year.

On the destination itself, one integrated project under a single design and supervision contract

with the joint venture of an international and a local firm is delivering three things together:

- (1) new visitor centre with new tracks and trails at the Waisali Rainforest Reserve;
- (2) cityscape beautification of the Savusavu foreshore and parts of Labasa; and
- (3) small scale infrastructure for community-based tourism organisations across Vanua Levu and Taveuni. Their teams are on the ground in Vanua Levu this month.

Alongside that project:

- (1) solar power from Savusavu Market, the Labasa Craft Market and Savusavu Hospital has passed feasibility and is going to tender;
- (2) a detailed design study for a new Savusavu landfill; and
- (3) the rehabilitation of the existing dump is underway, in close partnership with the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on people and enterprise, on 24th September, the programme signed a contract with a joint venture of a local and an international firm for a fifteen-month capacity building programme for micro, small and medium enterprises across Vanua Levu, and the community-based tourism support, I have mentioned, is already a live pilot.

Underneath all of it, the programme is funding an International Visitor Survey that runs through this whole phase, so that for the first time: government knows who comes to the North, why, for how long, what they spend; and every decision about the North is made on evidence rather than impression. Each of those is a piece of the 2050 picture, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is underway today. I will gladly give the House the details of many of them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Plan is being prepared to the standard of the best plans of its kind in comparable island states and I would be glad to tell the House what that comparison teaches us. But let me end where I began.

A child born in Savusavu or Labasa this year, will be 24 years old when this plan reaches its horizon. The question before the House is what kind of North that a young person inherits:

- (1) a division that has gone on losing its people to Suva and overseas; or
- (2) one with a tourism economy of the order of a billion dollars a year, built on its reefs and forests rather than at their expense and owned by the people who live there.

This is a 25-year plan, built on evidence and on the voice of the North, and its purpose is a Northern Division that keeps its people; protects its assets; and earns from them.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- We have several Members standing up. I will give the first follow-up question to honourable Taito Rokomatu then I will call on the other honourable Members.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for his Statement. The Northern Division reefs, forest, rivers and cultural heritage and the reasons visitors come, how will the Master Plan ensure that the growth protects rather than consumes of those assets? How will it build resilience to cyclones and climate change? Who will be responsible for implementing the plan once the Government has adopted it?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The plan starts from the position that the reefs, forests, the rivers and hot springs and the culture of the North are not the scenery of tourism, they are the products - the Great Sea Reef, the Somosomo Strait, Natewa Bay, Waisali Rainforest Reserve, Bouma National Heritage Park and

finite.

The plan sets limit on visitor use of these places, and it is those limits that reduce the demand that fix the ceiling on growth? It is one reason the consultant set the higher pathways aside. The communities themselves name the risks. In every workshop, the three threats that feared most on tourism growth worth saying; changes to their way of life, pressure on the ecosystems and the loss of their cultural values.

The plan treats those three as conditions that growth must satisfy, cost to be traded off, and it requires the landowner consent, customary protocols and *qoliqoli* rights to be respected before any development proceeds. Honourable Members, they may ask, what consuming those assets look like? The consultant, best from the North against destinations that grew fast and paid for it.

The best known is Boracay Bay in the Philippines, an island of 10 square kilometres that by 2017 was receiving 2 million visas a year, a third of all the tourists coming to the Philippines. It grew with sewerage, without water and waste systems to carry it. Nearly 200 businesses and thousands of households were never connected to a sewer, and uncreated waste ran through the drains into the sea. In 2018, the government of Philippines closed the whole island, the tourists for six months until October of that year to build a treatment plant, demolish the illegal structures and restore the water; thousands of people lost their jobs.

There is another example in Thailand, in Maya Bay on the island of Phi Phi Lei. It is the beach made famous by the film *The Beach*. You may have seen this movie by Leonardo DiCaprio. It became one of the most visited coasts in the world, visiting up to 5,000 visitors a day on boats that drop anchor on the reef. In June 2018 the Thai National Parks closed the bay for four months to let the coral recover. When the four months were up, the damage was found to be far worse than anyone had thought. Maya Bay did not reopen until January 2022, two and a half years later after the corals had been replanted by hand and reopened under strict conditions, a limit on visitor numbers, no boats, limited end of the bay, and no swimming.

Two of the best beaches in the world closed by the government because growth ran ahead of infrastructure, and the environment carried it. That is what the plan is written to prevent, and it is why the limit of infrastructure comes before growth. A strategic environmental and social adjustment is being prepared alongside the plans.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the plan will carry a set of measurable indicators for the North, and progress against them will be reported in my Ministry's Annual Report to this House, so that honourable Members can see year by year why the North is getting what the plan promises.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Please, honourable Members, keep your questions short and succinct.

HON. P.K. BALA.- A few weeks ago the Labasa Town Council was here for the public consultation. I just want confirmation from the honourable Minister whether urban planning for Labasa Town Council is also part of the Master Plan? How much consultancy fee has been paid to the consultants?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I could provide what has been done lately for Labasa, what is being planned, but there are some beautification programmes that are happening in Labasa. I shared this when I opened the Macuata Tourism Association, the launch in Nukubati previously. It is happening in Labasa, the market, the beautification programmes are happening. I could give you the details, honourable Member.

Consultants, one thing about this is, this is the first time we have a programme like this, and

it is World Bank. There is a way they do things. We have to manage expectations; US\$200 million translates to about FJ\$450 million. They are a highly structured organisation. What I am sharing with you today, I can assure you in 2050, Vanua Levu will become a billion-dollar tourism industry. It cannot go about in a haphazard way. Consultants will help you plan how to get there, identify what can be done.

As an example, we are looking at building an airport greenfield but there is also a belief that Savusavu Airport as it is, can be expanded to take in bigger aircrafts like ATR 72. The feasibility study is happening right now, and we will know for sure in November whether it can be done and how much. These are the best of the best. Let us not use the local politics to try and undermine them by some people who will go and talk to some players in there during their visit to Vanua Levu and believe that is the gospel. These are highly professional people. They will change Vanua Levu in a manner that you have never seen before.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, 25-year plan, most of us will not be in this room; we will be resting abroad. Now, the money we are borrowing is \$400 million. It is not a grant; it is a loan. Therefore, we have to manage that money well. We cannot be suspicious just because the communities have raised their concern and it was not just Opposition who went out as a committee, it was a bipartisan Committee made up of Government side and the Opposition. So, you cannot point your finger at the Committee here. We just gathered the information, and we came and shared it in this House. As much as you like to bury this information ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am coming to it, it is a context, it will surface one day. My question here is that we are focusing too much, before I come to the question.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Premila, I am sorry, you have run out of time. Honourable Members, please, remember, you only have a minute to ask your question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, a statement has been made that they talked to some local residents in Vanua Levu, told them things and that is how they formed their opinion. The team was ready, fully prepared to meet with the Committee from Parliament. They said that they came there like they already had made up their mind. I said, "Prepare yourself well, you are doing a great job. Share with the Committee what is happening on the ground." There is a lot happening on the ground. They said, "they look like they already made up their mind." So, you got to be very careful, you need to manage your expectations.

We will get there. What I am sharing with you today is master planning. One day, you can come and sit in the room with these people, and they show you how they do it in Jamaica and other parts of the world and the results they have realised out this. The North will be different. It is not going to happen all at once. There is going to be a build-up to that. The billion dollar could be realised much earlier than 2050.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my question is going to be straightforward. We are working on the infrastructure to bring tourists to Vanua Levu, we have wonderful beaches for them to enjoy. We already have a public facility as a swimming pool which has been leased to an individual which is expiring this year. Will the swimming pool be returned to Labasa Town Council so that tourists can enjoy it?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I am not fully aware of a swimming pool issue in Labasa. I know that things are happening in Labasa. Like I said, I will share it with you, but I do not think any

swimming pool was mentioned in my deliberations with World Bank.

Your airport in Labasa, the way it is going, it can become the Nadi in Vanua Levu. So, just hold your horse, it will be developed. The new terminal building looks good. You are going to build on the landside. Just believe in this and work with them. We will make regular reports to Parliament on the accomplishments of the World Bank.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Clarification, Madam Deputy Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Ok, make it quick.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as the honourable Deputy Prime Minister said, he will revisit Parliament with updates as it happens. Can he revisit Parliament with updates to the swimming pool, whether it is going to be returned or not.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- That is fair enough. Maybe you can put a question forward to the next Business Committee meeting.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, the ambitious plan is welcomed, yet millions are pumped into Tourism Fiji. Right now, honourable Minister, you have mentioned that the global media has taken up Fiji's HIV and drug crisis quite on a whole new level and it can affect our tourism numbers, because families do search before they travel. The question to the honourable Minister is, does the master plan include a contingency plan to cater for such epidemics in the future or global pandemics to ensure that our tourism numbers do not decline to Vanua Levu and Viti Levu?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the answer is yes. If you look at Fiji, other countries borrow from Fiji on how we handle our crisis. Honourable Korolavesau will tell you that. What have we been through? We have been through so much already, for the recovery for tourism as almost instant because we know how to handle crisis.

Going back to the question about HIV and drugs, as I highlighted yesterday, I was very apprehensive. I sat in Cabinet when this came up, but we have to do this. We have to alert the country that HIV and drugs have to be combatted head-on. I was worried about the implications in the tourism community. When you have a tourism product, you have to be very open with your market. Yes, there were headlines in Fiji about HIV, immediately, the headlines also appeared in New Zealand, CNN and BBC. So, it can impact on tourism, but we need to be transparent about the issue. They want to know what you are doing about it.

Yesterday, we tabled the Counter Narcotics Bureau Bill, and we should vote on that tomorrow. So, that is telling the world that we are taking steps to combat drugs, and there was the HIV/AIDS Bill that came yesterday, which we will pass tomorrow. Again, the world is saying, "okay, Fiji, we have faith in you, you have goodwill, but what are you doing about these issues? We are telling them, "We are meeting them head-on." That will reassure the market and continue to strengthen our tourism. As we speak, despite the headlines, despite CNN and BBC, the hotels are full and the flights into Fiji are all full.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.35 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Honourable Members, we welcome to our visitors' gallery today or this afternoon, various groups of people; the Kingdom Healing Ministry from Nadi and *Soqosoqo Vakamarama ni Yasana ko Lau*. You are most welcome to your Parliament, and I hope you will enjoy your stay with us this afternoon.

Honourable Members, before we proceed further, I wish to acknowledge with grateful thanks the Deputy Speaker, honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, for presiding over this morning's session. Thank you for your unflagging support of the Chair.

Secondly, I welcome back among our midst the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, honourable Sakeasi Ditoka, and the Minister for Information, honourable Lynda Tabuya, returning from their attendance of the United Nations General Assembly at the Big Apple. *Drau bula, drau mata vinaka mai*.

Honourable Members, a general word of caution on our etiquette as we progress and debate on matters and issues in the coming days touching on the Constitution. Each one of the honourable Members have definite views of these issues and this is the right forum to express them, to air them to the public. The word I had used from day one since my succeeding to this position is “decorum”. It is there in black and white in our Standing Orders.

What does it mean? It means that the expectation of the Chair, this Parliament and of the people of this country is that each one of you honourable Members behave notwithstanding how much a member loves or dislikes an issue, a motion or any matter that comes before this House, you will and must address it with proper, polite and socially correct and acceptable manner. Last evening was near chaotic, bordering, if not already, on some non-acceptable behaviour. It is my duty, therefore, and which I have sworn an oath to do so, and I will that the decorum of this House is maintained at all times, notwithstanding the weather.

QUESTIONS

Reduction of Drug Related Cases in Schools (Question No. 233/2026)

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I ask the question, I would like to congratulate the newly installed Tui Vuda, Ratu Josaia Tavaiaqia, who was traditionally installed as the tenth paramount chief of Vuda last month. I met *Na Turaga Na Tui Vuda*, Ratu Josaia Tavaiaqia, two weeks ago, and he stated that his first priority is improving educational facilities and pursuing the construction of a new school for the Vuda District. I wish him well in his new role as the *Turaga Na Tui Vuda*.

My question is:

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the Ministry's progress in reducing drug-related cases in primary and secondary schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I answer the question, I would like to join you in welcoming the representatives from the Kingdom Ministry from Nadi - *cola vina*; and the Soqosoqo Vakarama from Lau - *malo a bula*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had raised that this question had already been addressed. I think the honourable Member is not aware that this is the same question he raised as a Written Questions during the August Parliament sitting. I would like to inform the honourable Member of what was given during the August Parliament sitting and also continue with some areas that we would like this august House to be aware of, as well as the role of the general public.

In 2023, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were 3,627 cases, comprising 1,578 cases in primary schools and 2,049 cases in secondary schools, representing 1.6 percent of the student population. In 2024, there were 3,041 cases, comprising 1,758 cases in primary schools and 1,383 cases in secondary schools, comprising 1.36 percent of the student population. In 2025, there were 3,143 reported cases, comprising 1,508 cases in primary schools and 1,635 cases in secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the figures for all three years were below 2 percent. The Ministry's objective is to keep the level of drug-related cases in our schools below 2 percent through continued prevention, counselling, mentoring and support. The reported cases involved in these incidences' included substances such as *suki*, cigarettes, vaping products, alcohol, inhalant glue and marijuana - there were no reported cases of methamphetamine used in school during the period. The question is; where are these students now that had been reported?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these students remain in the school system with the aim of ensuring that they complete their secondary education. They are monitored by teachers and the Child Protection Officers in their respective schools, with parents and guardians involved, and follow-up provided through the appropriate support system.

Where a student or family requests a Find Another School (FAS) arrangement for a student, the Substance Abuse Advisory Council (SAAC) works with the relevant education office and parents to facilitate the relocation. For students in Year 11, Year 12 and Year 3, counselling may identify that vocational pathway, an alternative pathway is more appropriate, and where parents prefer this option, SAAC assists with facilitating enrolment in trade skills training.

For students involved in illicit drugs, such as *marijuana*, SAAC works with the Police Juvenile Unit and the Department of Children to provide support and ensure that the student is treated fairly through the justice process. For cases involving illegal substances, such as tobacco products, alcohol or *kava*, the school works with the parents, the child protection officer and a counsellor to identify the underlying issues and determine the appropriate intervention.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue of drugs in schools is a shared responsibility, and it is my duty to clarify and inform this august House that the teachers' area of responsibility for disciplining students in the Ministry is confined to the school boundary or the school environment, whereby teachers can monitor student actions. Once students walk out of the school gate, this is considered a public area, and student activities become the responsibility of other stakeholders, not just the teachers or the Ministry for Education. Students, as we all know, spend more time at home than in school. Early in the morning they come to school from home, and then they return home. I am sure you will agree with me that the Ministry for Education cannot hold the bulls by the horns alone. We need to have a united front from the family unit, *vanua*, government, religious organisations and civil society to restrain drug problems.

The Ministry has reviewed the School Drugs Policy and Counselling Policy. The amendments strengthen the roles of teachers in monitoring students, providing support and referring students for further assistance where required. The Child Protection Policy and Behavioural Management Policy, I think the honourable Member is fully aware, also guides schools in responding to student welfare and disciplinary concerns. When a drug-related case is identified in schools, the

first thing they do is, the parents are called to the schools, and the School Disciplinary Committee considers the circumstances and makes recommendations to the Head of School.

Depending on the severity of the case, disciplinary measures may include loss of privileges, school community work, self-reflection, journalling, suspension or a last warning, or the last option is usually to find another school. The student may also be referred for mentoring through the child protection officer, or a faith-based leader. Serious cases are referred to the Divisional Counsellor or SAAC. If a case involves child abuse, welfare is informed.

The drugs policy in schools sets out the responsibilities of the head of school, the child protection officer, teachers and parents. Where a case involves a legal substance, the school and parents address the matter internally with the appropriate support. Where an illicit drug is involved, a formal report is made to the police for intervention or further investigation with parents or guardians and counsellors involved in supporting the students.

In terms of prevention and awareness and training, the Ministry continues to strengthen prevention through training and awareness programmes for teachers, student leaders, chaplains, faith-based leaders, students, parents and communities. In 2024 to to-date, 170 secondary school child protection officers and 94 primary school child protection officers received training facilitated by SAAC, Fiji Police Force and the Ministry for Health. The training covered drugs, child protection and psychological support.

This year, 138 school chaplains and faith-based leaders accessed training on drugs, child protection and basic counselling skills. These included Christians, Hindu and Muslim faith-based leaders. Sir, SAAC also provided Good Character Training to 1,119 Year 8 students between 2024 and 2026. Awareness activities also included during the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDAAIT) in July. Teachers also share drug-related information with parents and guardians.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Fiji Police Force plays an important role in prevention and early intervention through school visits, as part of its holistic approach to addressing the illicit drug trade, and through this engagement the Police officers work with students and school communities on the dangers of drugs, crime prevention, personal safety, bullying, juvenile offending and other issues affecting our children and young people.

The Ministry has four Divisional Counsellors and 26 Ministry Counsellors, supported by five SAAC Counsellors. The Ministry works with the Ministry for Policing, Ministry for Health and Medical Services, Department of Children, parents, communities, faith-based organisations and other partners in addressing drug-related and social issues affecting children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, UNICEF is also providing funding support or drug-related workshops for teachers and parents, and DFAT is providing technical and funding support for the establishment of education district counselling services and refresher training for counsellors.

Sir, CCTV in Schools, the Ministry has also expanded CCTV coverage in schools. Previously, Parliament was informed that cameras had been installed in 108 primary schools and 46 secondary schools, a total of 154 schools altogether. To-date, CCTV has been installed in 144 primary schools and 78 secondary schools, bringing the total to 222 schools altogether, an increase of 68 schools.

Lastly, the Brighter Minds Programme, the Ministry has continued to implement the Brighter Minds Programme which was introduced in Fiji in 2025 as an extracurricular programme to complement classroom teaching. It targets children approximately 5 years to 15 years of age and

focuses on positive habits, self-regulation, confidence and resilience.

The programme develops resilience, self-confidence, emotional regulation, critical thinking and positive social behaviour. About 239 schools and 289 teachers have undergone this training. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child, we must continue to work together to protect our children, strengthen our schools and address the drug problems in our communities.

MR. SPEAKER.- We now open the floor for supplementary questions.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for a very detailed response. The reason honourable Minister, why I have asked this Oral Question because drug related cases has increased over the years and the Written Response which was sent to me was very brief. In 2024; 3,041 students were found in possession of drugs, and the number increased in 2025 to 3,143. My question, has the Ministry identified schools and education districts where drug related incidents are very high in numbers?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That is also part of the Written Question that was provided earlier. I think the honourable Member can be directed to that Written Question or if he intends for me to provide the details, I can give that to the honourable Member.

Feasibility Study for the Proposed Yasawa Island Airport
(Question No. 234/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the current status of the feasibility study for the proposed Yasawa Island Airport?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank honourable Tubuna for the question regarding the status of the feasibility study for the proposed Yasawa Island Airport.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the proposed Yasawa Island Airport is a strategic initiative that supports Government's vision of strengthening national connectivity, improving access to remote and maritime communities, and facilitating the sustainable development of Fiji's tourism industry. The project will enhance accessibility to the Yasawa Group, support economic activity, improve the movement of people and services, and contribute to broader national development objectives.

Given the significance of such an infrastructure investment, the Government has adopted a measured and evidence-based approach to ensure that any future decisions are informed by comprehensive technical, economic, financial, environmental, and social assessments. Accordingly, the feasibility study represents the next major milestone in delivering the Yasawa Island Airport and will provide the foundation for its successful development and implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the 2025-2026 financial year, Government undertook a range of preliminary activities to support the proposed project. This included engagement with key stakeholders and consultations with landowners on the proposed airport locations to ensure the relevant land-related considerations and stakeholder perspectives were appropriately taken into account as the project progressed.

To further enhance preparation for the feasibility study, the Government subsequently undertook a competitive Expression of Interest process to identify suitably qualified firms with the

requisite, expertise and experience to undertake the study. The process was designed to assess market capability and ensure that the project could draw upon the necessary technical and professional expertise required for infrastructure development of this nature.

The Expression of Interest process successfully achieved its intended objective, confirming the availability of suitably qualified service providers capable of undertaking the feasibility study. This provided Government with the necessary assurance to progress towards the procurement of consultancy services for the next phase of the project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following these preparatory activities, the project was temporarily placed on hold as part of a Government directive to suspend new projects during a period of economic uncertainty arising from the Middle East fuel crisis. This reflected Government's prudent approach to fiscal management during a period of global economic volatility and rising fuel costs.

Notwithstanding this temporary delay, Government remained committed to the project and retained the foundational work that had already been completed. I am pleased to inform this House that funding is provided in the 2026-2027 budget for the continuation of the Yasawa Airport Feasibility Study. This demonstrates Government's strong commitment to progressing the Yasawa Island Airport project and delivering the necessary technical and planning work required to move the project towards implementation.

Consequently, the project has resumed, with Government progressing the procurement of consultancy services to undertake the feasibility study in accordance with established procurement and governance requirements. This study represents the next critical steps towards the development of the proposed airport and will provide the framework for future implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the feasibility study will be undertaken in phases and will provide Government with a comprehensive assessment of the proposed airport's viability. The study will examine a range of critical considerations, including technical requirements, operational considerations, environmental and social factors, economic benefits, financial sustainability and implementation options.

The study will provide the evidence base necessary to support the successful development of the project and identify the most effective pathway for implementation. It will also ensure that any future decisions are supported by sound analysis, appropriate stakeholder engagement and responsible planning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government remains firmly committed to improving aviation connectivity throughout Fiji and advancing strategic infrastructure investments that support economic growth and regional development. The Yasawa Airport project is a key component of this vision and is expected to significantly enhance connectivity, support tourism expansion, create employment opportunities, attract investment and improve access to essential services throughout the Yasawa Group. The project will play an important role in unlocking the region's full economic potential while contributing to national development objectives.

At the same time, Government is committed to ensuring that any future investment of this nature is supported by robust evidence, sound planning, stakeholder consultation and prudent financial management. The feasibility study will therefore play a critical role in confirming the most effective pathway for delivering a project that is technically sound, environmentally responsible, financially sustainable and capable of delivering lasting benefits to the nation.

Government will continue to work closely with landowners, communities, relevant

Government agencies, development partners, and industry stakeholders to ensure that all perspectives are appropriately considered throughout this process and that any future development is undertaken in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, Government has completed the preliminary groundwork for the proposed Yasawa Airport, secured funding in the 2026-2027 Budget, and is now progressing the procurement process for the engagement of consultants to undertake the feasibility study. These are significant milestones that demonstrate Government's commitment to advancing this important project.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are there any supplementary questions?

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- When is the feasibility study expected to commence and be completed?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the procurement process for engaging the consultancy firm is currently underway, subject to procurement requirements being completed in a timely manner to anticipate a study to commence within this financial year. The duration will ultimately depend on the scope of work and the consolidation methodology, but Government expects the study to be completed within a reasonable timeframe to support informed decision making.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Terms of Reference to the consultants who are doing this feasibility study, is the location 2,000-odd-meter runway that currently exists on Yasawa? Is that the same location? Does the TOR also say that we are looking at extending it so that larger aircrafts can land there?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be building greenfield and we have identified two sites. All the necessary work is happening. The aviation people are taking all sorts of surveys that goes in line with building an airport, the wind, et cetera, as you know, it is a highly technical exercise. But right now, we are zeroing in on two locations in Yasawa and they know, and one of them will be chosen for this.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the fact that we are embarking on a seven-star resort in that particular area, the one that emanated many moons ago now, I specifically asked about the larger aircrafts because the preference from those that travel to those places is to go directly to it. So, are you looking at lengthening the runways in the TOR so that they can actually land jet aircrafts?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Terms of Reference is for a big aircraft to land in the Yasawa's. You may know that there is quite a lot of plans for the Yasawa's, all the developers are interested, we announced that in this House. It will be conditional on the construction of the airport. We are looking at an ATR type of aircraft to land in the Yasawa's. Currently, as you know, it is only the small 10-seater. So, you are talking on a scale when you look at building an airport that can take the ATR 72, indicating what is there in the Yasawa's in terms of potential growth for tourism.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- My question to the honourable Minister is; how much funding has been allocated in the 2026- 2027 Budget for the feasibility study?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the funding has been provided under the 2026-2027 for the feasibility study. The exact expenditure will be determined through the procurement process to secure the value for money and compliance with Government procurement procedures.

Written QuestionsStatistics on Pending Cases with the Judiciary
(Question No. 235/2026)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, and Acting Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament on the total number of cases pending before the Judiciary as at 31st July, 2026, categorised by the year in which each case was registered and by case type, including Civil, Criminal and other categories, and provide the following breakdown for the –

- (a) Magistrates Court, by each Magistrates Court location throughout Fiji;
- (b) High Court, by Suva, Lautoka and Labasa; and
- (c) Court of Appeal and Supreme Court?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table the response.

Seismic Events Recorded in 2025-2026
(Question No. 236/2026)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the following -

- (a) the number of seismic events recorded during the 2025-2026 financial year; and
- (b) how investment in seismic stations, monitoring technology and specialist staff has improved Fiji's ability to detect, analyse and respond to earthquakes and associated tsunami threats?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby provide my written response.

PROCEDURAL MOTION FOR THE CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2026

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 6(1), I move:

That -

- (a) Standing Order 6(5) and Standing Order 92 are suspended, so as to allow the honourable Prime Minister to proceed with the First Reading of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026; and
- (b) Standing Order 6(5) and Standing Order 92 are suspended until the conclusion of the Third Reading and vote on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion before the House for the suspension of Standing Orders 6(5) and 92 is to enable the honourable Prime Minister to table the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 for First Reading. The

Amendment Bill seeks to repeal the provisions of the 2013 Constitution, other than Chapter 10 on Immunity, and to substitute the repealed provisions with a new provision set out in the Schedule to the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the suspension of Standing Orders 6(5) and 92 is necessary because Standing Order 92(1) provides that the Bill is out of order if it seeks, amongst other things, to repeal, infringe, or diminish the effect of Chapter 11 of the Constitution which prescribes the constitutional amendment process itself, and part (d) of Chapter 12 which provides transitional provisions. Given that the proposed Bill seeks to amend these provisions, it is necessary that the Standing Orders be suspended to enable the Bill to be introduced and considered by this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in your ruling of 6th March, 2025 to a Point of Order raised by honourable Koya to a suspension motion made under the same Standing Orders, you rightly referred to the Parliament's role to make and unmake laws, where you emphasise that the legislative power should not be settled by impediments that are not in conformity with the general principles of law.

It would, therefore, be contrary to the proper legislative function of Parliament if this House was being prevented from considering amendments to the Constitutional amendment provisions themselves contained in the proposed Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026.

For the information of the House, since the Government first tabled the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill on 5th March 2025, which was defeated at its Second Reading to commence this constitutional reform process, a number of significant constitutional developments have occurred.

In June 2025, the Government made a referral of questions concerning amendment threshold provisions in Chapter 11 of the 2013 Constitution to the Supreme Court, which were exceptionally onerous for constitutional amendment, namely, the requirement for the support of three quarters of all Members of Parliament at both, the Second and Third Reading of a Constitution (Amendment) Bill, and that three quarters of all registered voters vote in favour of that Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 29th August, 2025, the Supreme Court determined that Sections 6 and 162 of the Constitution be read down by lowering the threshold for Parliament to two-thirds at both, the Second and Third Reading, and by lowering the referendum threshold to a simple majority of registered voters who actually voted. This determination affirms that constitutional amendment procedures must remain workable within a democratic system and should not be interpreted in a manner that prevents the ability of a people or nation acting through their elected representatives to amend the Constitution, which I might add must remain a living document capable of responding to the evolving needs and aspirations of society.

Following the Supreme Court's determination, which has binding effect, the Coalition Government advised His Excellency, the President, to establish a Constitution Review Commission in March of this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we know, the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) commenced its work in March this year and concluded its deliberations at the end of August, following extensive consultation and review throughout the nation. Its mandate was to examine the constitutional framework and make recommendations concerning constitutional reforms in light of the Supreme Court's determination and the aspirations of the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to emphasise that the Bill proposed is not a measure that has emerged hastily or without due consideration. Rather, it is the culmination of a deliberate process involving judicial consideration by the Supreme Court, the establishment of an independent

Constitution Review Commission and several months of public engagement and analysis, and subsequent consideration by the Government of the day.

The Commission's Report was tabled last week, and Parliament will now consider the product of a constitutional review process. It is not a rushed, hurried, or ill-thought-of process, as alluded to by various commentators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst the Supreme Court did not read down the provisions concerning the unamendability of Chapter 12 or transitions, the proposed Bill adopts a measured and balanced approach, thereby, preserving continuity, stability, certainty, and within our constitutional framework. The suspension motion is consistent in moving forward in a balanced, non-disruptive approach.

The Bill does not retain the existing referendum requirement under Chapter 11 of the 2013 Constitution. This amendment is consistent with the Draft Bill submitted by the Constitution Review Commission and reflects the principles of a representative democracy.

Additionally, the Bill does not retain Part D of Chapter 12, as those provisions were transitional in nature and intended to facilitate the implementation of the 2013 Constitution, which have now substantially served their purpose. Part D also contains extensive ouster provisions that seek to place actions and decisions of the State, taken under decrees, promulgations, and other laws enacted prior to the commencement of the 2013 Constitution beyond the scrutiny of the Courts. Such provisions are difficult to reconcile with the fundamental principles of constitutional democracy, the rule of law, and the accountability of public power.

At the same time, the Government recognises the importance of legal certainty and constitutional stability. The Bill expressly provides that actions and decisions lawfully taken by the State under those laws before the commencement of the Bill will not be reopened or retrospectively challenged merely as a consequence of the removal of the ouster provisions.

The Bill strikes a careful and balanced approach in the overall interests of the nation. It restores the constitutional principles that governmental actions should not be permanently insulated from judicial scrutiny, while preserving certainty in respect of actions already undertaken by the State. The approach adopted, therefore, promotes constitutional accountability without creating legal uncertainty or unsettling settled matters of governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to explain these circumstances. It is both necessary and appropriate, therefore, that this House suspends Standing Orders 6(5) and 92, first, to allow the honourable Prime Minister to proceed with the First Reading of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 and, thereafter, to allow the House to consider and determine the Bill through to its Third Reading and final vote.

I, therefore, support the motion for suspension and commend it before the House.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of Government in Parliament for his explanation of the motion that is before the House.

As a precursor to my statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been studying your Ruling on the Point of Order that was raised by honourable Koya. I have not fully understood it, I must say, and I hope that you will allow me to go through the points that I have, and if there is anything here that is

contrary to that ruling, I hope that you will correct me at the end.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of the contents of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026. One of the things that I have learnt during the brief period that I have been here as Member of a Committee of Parliament is that under the Venice Commission, one of the guidelines that they have is that you do not amend electoral laws 12 months out of elections. I am not too sure whether the amendment that will be done by Government in terms of the amendment to the Constitution will actually do that. This is one of the concerns that we also had when we were looking at the three Electoral Bills that the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee had looked at.

There are a number of things that we have in terms of this particular motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Standing Order 6 allows Parliament to suspend its Standing Orders, however, Standing Order 6(5) expressly or very clearly states that the suspension of any Standing Order does not permit the transaction of any business in breach of the Constitution or any other law. That means it says that you can suspend the Standing Order, but not to the extent that it breaches anything in the Constitution. That is what is expressly stated in Standing Order 6(5). Therefore, the fact that Parliament may suspend Standing Order 92 does not automatically mean that Parliament may do whatever Standing Order 92 presently prevents. So, it presently prevents going against the Constitution. That is the first point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Standing Order 92(1) then says, and I quote: “A Bill that the Constitution does not allow Parliament to address is out of order and may not be introduced.” That is very clearly stated in that Standing Order. The Standing Order already provides that prohibition of what is allowed and what is not allowed. That means, that Standing Order 92 does not, itself, create the constitutional restriction - it recognises and enforces restrictions which already exist in the Constitution. So, there are already restrictions in the Constitution and the only thing that this Standing Order does, it just reinforces the thing that is already in the Constitution.

As we know, the Constitution is the supreme law of this country. Therefore, suspending Standing Order 92 only removes the parliamentary rule. It does not remove the constitutional restriction, because Standing Order 92 reinforces the constitutional restriction. If you take that out, it does not remove the constitutional restriction that is already there. That is the way that we read this, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The third point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that I do not know what will be in the Constitution (Amendment) Bill – will it be an entirely new Constitution or just amendments to certain parts of the Constitution? I think, later on, we will be able to see that. I am not too sure about that as we look at the provisions of the Constitution and the Standing Orders, where there are powers given to Government to replace the entire Constitution (if it is looking at replacing the entire Constitution) through the procedure that it now proposes to follow – the suspensions of these two Standing Orders, moving forward.

Standing Order 6, Mr. Speaker, Sir, cannot itself be the answer because Standing Order 6 is only a rule governing parliamentary processes, so it cannot be the way forward.

Section 160(7) of the 2013 Constitution expressly states, and I quote:

“... the word ‘amend’ or ‘amendment’ is intended to be understood broadly, so that the section applies to any proposal to repeal, replace, revise, or alter any provision of this Constitution.”

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is my contention that if Government proposes to replace the existing Constitution, Section 160 itself treats replacement of the Constitution as a constitutional amendment. The replacing is part of the process of amendment, and if replacing one provision falls within Section 160, replacing the entire Constitution cannot fall outside Section 160, simply because every provision is being replaced at the same time. So, it is part of the amendment process.

Section 159(1) of the 2013 Constitution provides, and I quote:

“...Constitution, or any provision of this Constitution, may be amended in accordance with the procedure prescribed in this Chapter (Chapter 11), and may not be amended in any other way.”

It expressly states in the Constitution that it cannot be amended in any other way. We will have to look whether there is anything here that permits the Government to use these Standing Orders to introduce a replacement Constitution.

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, I am just expressing my thoughts. I have already asked this leave. You are not the Speaker.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- You may carry on.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Given the instructions today, I will try to keep it toned down.

If replacing the Constitution falls within the amendment under Section 160(7), Section 159(1) says how that must be done. A suspension of Standing Order 92 cannot create another method which the Constitution itself says it cannot be used.

The sixth point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 2 of the 2013 Constitution declares that the Constitution is the supreme law of Fiji. More importantly, Section 2(5) provides, and I quote:

“This Constitution cannot be abrogated or suspended by any person, and may only be amended in accordance with the procedures prescribed in Chapter 11.”

It says that this is the only way.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- An entirely new of the Constitution necessarily means that the present Constitution will cease to operate as Fiji's Constitution. The Government, therefore, and I hope, Sir, that you will be able to explain how that can occur consistently with Section 2(5) of the Constitution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

One of the things that we have here is Standing Order 92. Parliament has procedural power, under Standing Order 6, to suspend a Standing Order. The second point here is the Constitution itself. The Constitution itself regulates how it may be repealed, replaced, revised, or altered. Removing the first barrier does not automatically remove the second. That is the contention that we have, Sir. So, Standing Order 6(5) confirms this because it expressly says that the suspension of a Standing Order does not permit business in breach of the Constitution.

Section 159(2) of the Constitution protects certain parts of the existing Constitution from repeal, infringement or diminution, including Chapter 10, Part D of Chapter 12 and Chapter 11.

Standing Order 92, especially, reflects these restrictions. For example, it declares Bills affecting Chapter 10, Part D of Chapter 12 and Chapter 11 to be out of order. So, if these prohibitions cease to exist, are replaced or have their effect diminished, merely suspending Standing Order 92 does not answer the constitutional issue.

So, Parliament, we, are subject to the Constitution. The Constitution stands supreme over the Standing Orders, and I think this was made clear with your words also, I think it was in March early this year or was it last year, or a few years ago. That is the first thing the Constitution stands supreme over the Standing Orders.

The Supreme Court, in its advisory opinion, stated that the 2013 Constitution is valid. That is what the Supreme Court said, the entrenched provision of the Constitution is valid, that both Parliament and the Judiciary are subject to the Constitution. So, if a Bill touches in terms of amending, or looks and tries to amend or repeal or replace the entrenched provisions of the Constitution before suspending the Standing Orders, Parliament must ensure that such a Bill is not proper in terms of touching Chapters 10, 11, and 12 of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had the opportunity also to learn some of the comments that were made by the former Chief Justice Daniel Fatiaki when he was making comments to the Constitution Review Commission. One of the things he pointed out in his submission was Section 98(6) of the Constitution which states, and I quote: "Decisions of the Supreme Court are, subject to subsection (7), binding on all other courts of the State." I am not too sure whether Parliament is a court or not a court because it actually makes laws, and Courts interpret the law, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think at the end of the day, in my very little knowledge of the law and how it operates, I still feel, and I think all of us will agree in this House, and all the people of Fiji agree that one of the things that we need to do is to ensure always the rule of law.

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am not going to be the Deputy Prime Minister, I am getting old.

Whenever the rule of law is diminished in this country, it has led to a lot of problems in the past. Beginning from the events of 1987, which is all behind....

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. J. USAMATE.- No, no, I am just making....

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is just a statement of fact. We have been asked to have decorum in this House, so you can see I am speaking with a lot of decorum. It is just a matter of fact.

Rule of law and order started with that. I am not blaming anyone - I am just saying that that happened. We have had instances in our past where we have gone against the rule of law. And once that happens, it begins to deteriorate over time. We have an opportunity to make sure that we try to stick with the rule of law.

I think, in terms of moving this country forward, that is one thing that we must get back to - make sure that we have the rule of law. I believe, for instance, in my mind, that what we are trying to do here is not in accordance with the Constitution, which is the supreme law of this country. Constitution, in my mind, is above the Standing Orders, and I believe that what we are doing here, and you probably will be correcting me, Sir, from your interpretation of the law as you had pointed out in your former opinion on the Point of Order that was raised by honourable Koya.

My own view is that we are trying to circumvent the very specific provisions that are in the Constitution itself.

With those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not agree, and I do not endorse the motion that Government has brought to Parliament. Thank you, Sir.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House, to express my full support for the motion that has been moved by the Leader of Government in Parliament, seeking the suspension of Standing Orders 6(5) and 92 to enable the introduction of the consideration of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 by the honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion before us is a procedural one, but its significance extends beyond just procedure. It concerns the ability of Parliament to perform one of its most fundamental constitutional functions, namely, to consider, debate, and determine proposed legislations before the House.

The issue before us today, Mr. Speaker, is, therefore, not the substantive merits of the Bill, but whether this Parliament should afford the opportunity to consider the Bill in accordance with the democratic and parliamentary processes of these changes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 29th August, 2025, the Supreme Court of our country provided legal clarity regarding the origins of the 2013 Constitution, affirming that it was not founded on the Draft Constitution Bill submitted by the Constitution Review Commission, led by Professor Yash Ghai, but was instead developed through a different process involving a select group of individuals by the previous Government.

The Supreme Court ruled that the 2013 Constitution had a democratic deficit. Apart from those select groups of individuals, the absence of all others. Mr. Speaker, that finding is significant because it provides the important context to the constitutional reform discussion presently before this House.

It recognises that while many people participated in the consultative process undertaken by the Ghai Commission, the constitutional instrument that, ultimately, came into force, followed a different course. It is, therefore, appropriate that Parliament should now have the opportunity to consider proposed reforms arising from the constitutional review process that has been undertaken and, once again, engaged directly with the people of Fiji.

Thereafter, the Constitution Review Commission undertook extensive consultation throughout the country, receiving submissions from citizens, community leaders, civil society organisations, faith-based groups, professional bodies and other stakeholders. Accordingly, the Bill now proposed for consideration is not the product of a closed process. Rather, it is the culmination of first-step judicial guidance, extensive public consultation and careful consideration by the Commission.

Mr. Speaker, constitutional legitimacy is at its strongest when constitutional reform is informed by the people, guided by the rule of law, and undertaken through transparent and democratic institutions. A constitution derives not only from its legal force, but also from the confidence and acceptance of those whom it seeks to govern.

The process that has led us to this point reflects those very principles. It has been characterised by public participation, democratic accountability, judicial scrutiny and institutional oversight. In my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, this provides a sound, credible and legitimate basis upon which Parliament can now discharge its constitutional responsibility by considering the proposed amendment through this parliamentary process.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important to reflect on the fundamental constitutional role of Parliament. Parliament is a supreme legislative institution of the State, and is vested with the authority to make, amend, and repeal laws, on behalf of the people of Fiji. The legislative power entrusted to Parliament is not merely procedural in nature - it is a direct expression of the sovereignty of the people exercised through their elected representatives. Members of this House have been elected to deliberate upon matters of national importance and to determine, through debate and lawful decision-making, the future direction of our nation.

The motion before us does not predetermine the outcome of the Bill, rather, it seeks to enable Parliament to perform its constitutional function by allowing the Bill to be introduced, debated, scrutinised and, ultimately, voted upon. Mr. Speaker, Sir, to prevent Parliament from considering the Bill at all would be to restrict the very institution entrusted with the legislative authority of the State to make it. Supporting this motion is, therefore, not simply about allowing the introduction of a Bill, it is about upholding the constitutional role that we all hold, authority and dignity of Parliament as a nation's law-making body.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, if the Bill proceeds beyond its First and Second Reading, it will be subjected to the scrutiny of the relevant Parliamentary Committee process. That process will provide a further opportunity for members of the public, civil society organisations, professional bodies, community groups and other stakeholders to make submissions on the content of the Bill. Public participation will, therefore, not cease with the introduction of the Bill to the House. To the contrary, the parliamentary process will create an additional avenue through which the people of Fiji may express their views and contribute to this constitutional reform process.

This demonstrates, Mr. Speaker, that the proposed reforms have not been developed in haste, and will not be determined without scrutiny. Judicial consideration has been obtained, public consultations have been undertaken, expert recommendations have been received, and parliamentary debate will follow. Committee scrutiny will, of course, take place. The process is, therefore, entirely consistent with the principles of transparency, accountability, and representative democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I am reminded of your ruling that Parliament exists “to make and unmake laws”. Those words reflect a fundamental constitutional principle. Parliament is the forum in which legislative processes are examined, they are challenged, defended and, ultimately, determined. Whether Members ultimately support or reject the Bill is a matter for a later stage of this legislative process. However, Parliament should not be prevented from discharging its responsibility to consider the Bill in the first place.

In my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, the suspension of Standing Orders 6(5) and 92 is both necessary and justified. It preserves the integrity of Parliament's legislative function, enables this House to discharge its constitutional responsibilities, and ensures that matters of significant national importance, such as constitution-making, are considered in the institutions specifically established for that purpose.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I wish to clarify, in case that there is any doubt that that the Supreme Court's determination of 29th August, 2026, has provided Government with a clear and workable constitutional pathway for the introduction of the proposed Bill into Parliament. In

particular, Section 160(2) of the Constitution now prescribes that a constitutional amendment must be supported by a two-third majority, scaling down of what was there in black and white, of all Members of Parliament at both the Second and Third Readings. And should the Bill secure this amendment threshold, it passed its passage at referendum, will require only a simple majority of those who voted, or registered voters who cast a vote on the Bill. Accordingly, the amendment process contemplated under Section 160 of the Constitution, including the proposed Bill, will proceed in accordance with those prescribed thresholds.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, support for this motion is support for your Parliament. It is support for the principle that legislative questions should be debated and determined in this House by the elected representatives of the people of Fiji. It is supported for due process, democratic participation, and parliamentary accountability, and for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion before the House.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to fully support the motion before the House to suspend Standing Orders 6(5) and 92 to allow Government to introduce the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 for its consideration by the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I be allowed to say a few words in the vernacular. *Sa gauna saka ni rai i liu* (It is time to look ahead.)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we reflect on the origins of the Standing Order, we know exactly the intent of the Standing Orders. They were to reflect what was deemed by the Supreme Court as unamendable provisions in the Constitution.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Order was really a reflection of what was in the Constitution, and as correctly pointed out by the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, you have ruled already on the ability to actually debate matters regarding the Constitution in this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion is not about circumventing democracy - rather, it is about ensuring that Parliament is able to perform its fundamental constitutional responsibility as the lawmaking institution in this country. Before Parliament can properly debate, scrutinise and decide upon constitutional reforms, it must be allowed to consider the Bill, and that is precisely why the suspension of the Standing Orders is absolutely necessary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Constitution is the supreme law of our land. However, as alluded to by my honourable colleagues, constitutions are not intended to be static and frozen in time - they must be capable of evolving to meet the aspirations, expectations and realities of the people they serve.

On 29th August, 2025, the Supreme Court, Mr. Speaker, affirmed this important principle by recognising that constitutional amendment procedures must remain workable within a democratic society, and should not be interpreted in a manner that effectively prevents constitutional change through democratic institutions. Honourable Vosarogo talked about the democratic deficit, which was the centrepiece of the Supreme Court ruling, and it is obvious, Sir, that the ability of this House to discuss the proposed amendments in this Constitution is quite clear.

Sir, the Government has approached this process in a responsible, measured, and deliberate manner. The proposed Bill is not a product of a rushed decision or a sudden initiative, rather it is the culmination of adhering to the rule of law, Mr. Speaker, observing due process, observing public consultations, and also looking very carefully at policy considerations.

Mr. Speaker, the call for constitutional reform that we are discussing here today did not just begin in the last few months. For many, many years, there have been consistent calls or consistent cries from the people of Fiji to review the 2013 Constitution, arising from a widely held view that the 2013 Constitution, as alluded to by honourable Vosarogo, was not born of a fully participatory process driven by the people themselves. The constitutional review was therefore not a simple policy objective of the Government, but was a commitment made by this Government to the people of Fiji. In electing us to this House, honourable Speaker, the people have entrusted us with a mandate to examine the Constitutional framework, and that is why we are here today.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to note that to deny the introduction of the Bill at this stage would not only simply deny a legislative process from proceeding, but it would deny Parliament from considering the recommendations arising from extensive national consultation from the thousands of Fijians who participated in it. In effect, it would bring to an end a national conversation that the people themselves have helped to shape.

Mr. Speaker, the least we owe to the people who participated in this process is the opportunity to hear their voices in this House through the process we are about to embark on, which is open, transparent, and democratic in its nature. It is also important to note that the provisions of the Bill have been carefully framed to balance its constitutional accountability with legal certainty. As the Leader of the Government in Parliament has already explained, the Bill preserves a few Chapters, such as the one on immunity.

Today, we have a date with history, Mr. Speaker, and the Standing Orders must be set aside, to allow the debate on this Bill to proceed, because at the very least, that is what we owe to the people of Fiji.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this is only the start of this process. After the Bill is tabled, have a first vote on the Bill, then we have another vote on Friday, after which, we take the Bill to the people of Fiji, where all of us in this House will listen and hear the exact sentiments of the people of this country. I think we owe it to the people of Fiji to complete that whole process.

We will come back here in November, Mr. Speaker, and finally make a decision on the amendments. However, I think, as the responsible Members of this House and people that have been called to serve the people of Fiji, we owe it to the people of Fiji to involve them in the next round of conversations.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I truly and fully support the setting aside of Standing Orders 6(5) and 92, to ensure that as this side of the House has done since day one, uphold the rule of law, respect democratic principles, and ensure that this country becomes unified under a new Constitution.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to oppose this motion to suspend Standing Orders 6(5) and 92.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion is about whether Parliament will respect the rules that are designed to protect the Constitution and the people of Fiji. Let me make this simple for the people outside this Chamber. Why does the Government need to suspend the very Standing Orders that prevent Parliament from dealing with certain constitutional matters?

Standing Order 6(5) is clear. It says that suspending a Standing Order does not permit Parliament to conduct business in breach of the Constitution or any other law. Now, that is an important safeguard. It means that even when Parliament suspends one of its own procedural rules,

Parliament does not suddenly become more powerful than the Constitution. The Constitution remains the supreme law. Standing Orders are made to help Parliament do its work. They are not a licence for Parliament to escape the constitutional requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that distinction is extremely important. The Government says it needs to suspend Standing Orders 6(5) and 92 to allow the constitutional amendment process to proceed. I ask; if the Government believes its proposed constitutional amendments are lawful, why does it need to remove the safeguards that stand in the way of the Bill?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 92 exists for a reason. It prevents Parliament from entertaining certain Bills concerning the Constitution, including matters relating to Chapter 11. The Government now wants to remove that barrier. We all know Parliament makes laws, the Supreme Court interprets laws, and there is separation of powers which is extremely important and necessary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament must work independently of Judiciary. However, both Parliament and Judiciary are subjected to the Constitution, so the practices of Parliament must operate within the ambit of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even the Speaker's ruling in 2025 recognised an important principle: Standing Orders are subordinate to the Constitution. Because once you start removing safeguards simply because they are inconvenient, you have to ask, what protection is left for the people? Parliament is not here simply to make it easier for the Government to pass legislation. Parliament is here to scrutinise the Government, Parliament is here to debate, Parliament is here to question, and Parliament is here to protect the public interest. When the Constitution itself is being changed, those responsibilities become even more important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, constitutional change is not an ordinary piece of legislation that we normally deal with in this House. A Constitution determines the rules by which the Governments are formed, how Parliament operates, how power is exercised, and what rights and protections citizens have. Therefore, changing the Constitution requires greater care, not fewer safeguards. The Government may have the numbers in this Parliament but having the numbers does not mean having the right to remove every procedural protection. A parliamentary majority is powerful, but the Constitution is more powerful.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want the public to understand what is at stake. The Government must demonstrate that the proposed process is consistent with the Constitution and the Supreme Court's opinion, and it must demonstrate that Parliament is not simply using procedures to make a difficult constitutional question easier to pass. We cannot change the rules simply because the existing rules are inconvenient. That is precisely when rules matter most.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also a wider principle here. Today, it may be one constitutional safeguard, tomorrow, it may be another, and if Parliament becomes comfortable with suspending safeguards whenever they stand in the way of Government business, we weaken the institution that is supposed to hold Government accountable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also heard from our colleagues. We are told that Constitution is a living document. Yes, it should be a living document, but the way we have reduced the safeguard, it means that any Government that will come into power, will be able to change the Constitution to suit their own interest. We have seen this is happening in the region. There are a number of countries within the region which are not stable, and we do not want to bring about instability in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have also heard the Deputy Prime Minister, the honourable Manoa

Kamikamica, talking about the Standing Orders. He said very clearly that the Standing Orders were drawn to protect the Constitution, but I would like to remind him that the Standing Orders were reviewed by the Standing Orders Committee. Why did they not change it? You have the numbers, but you did not remove it. Now you cannot come here and blame everyone else for not changing what you should have done at that time.

I have heard again from the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, there was a consistent call from the people of Fiji to change the Constitution. Okay, all right. Yet the verdict was not given to you. You did not win the election straight because that verdict was given to you to change the Constitution. That verdict was not given to you. You came into power by one vote, and that for one vote, you had to come in collusion with three parties. So, none of you were given a straight verdict by the public that you can go there and change the Constitution. That verdict was not given, so do not ride on that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. I thought I needed to bring some clarity on the idea and the rationale behind this motion. These Standing Orders are products of what the Parliament decides by the Standing Order Committee. This Standing Order could have been changed before, in light of the Supreme Court decision. I think the debate on the motion is straying in a different direction.

With all due respect to my colleagues and everyone who has spoken, I think today is not the time to discuss the merits of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 or why and where it came about. Today, this motion is very clear. It is a suspension motion: no amendment to a suspension motion may be moved and no debate is allowed on it. The suspension motion comes with your approval, Mr. Speaker, Sir. For the general public, it is important to understand this process. It is correct that Parliament has the power, and under Standing Order 20, you have absolute powers to facilitate discussion on any issue in Parliament, and suspension of Standing Orders under Standing Order 6, is allowed.

Although we could have gone for suspension of Standing Order 6(5), and then another motion to suspend Standing Order 92, that perhaps would have been a proper way to do it. However, now that both motions are there, I know there is a lot of misunderstanding in the public. One journalist whom I corrected this morning said the Bill is going to be presented to Parliament, and there will be a vote. I said to him, there will not be a vote today. The Bill is going to be tabled for the Second Reading.

Some of the points that honourable Members are talking about now, is a matter for Friday. If we are going to debate the Second Reading. That is when we are going to vote whether the Constitution (Amendment) Bill is referred to a Parliamentary Select Committee or a Standing Committee for the Bill to come back. If we do not get two-third majority on Friday, and that is a matter because we have not seen the Bill. I have not seen the Bill yet. So, we will decide after reading the Bill whether we support the Bill to go to a Third Reading on Friday, and that is when we can look at the merits of the Bill. Why the Bill should be referred to the Third Reading.

Today, this motion is really about getting the honourable Prime Minister to present the Draft Bill to Parliament. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is simple, and we will all have the affinity. The issue is very clear. If there is no two-third majority on Friday, the Bill does not go to the Third Reading. And that is the end of the process until we start a new process. So, let us consider this motion in that perspective to allow the honourable Prime Minister to move the Bill, so, that we have an opportunity to look at the Bill and we come back to Parliament on Friday when we vote on the Second Reading. That is when we can talk about some of these things, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, I hope I have made myself clear about the Suspension Motion and the process. No one is forcing anything on anyone, and I do not

want to force anything on myself. If I have to vote against the Second Reading on Friday, I will vote against it. That is the point that I want to make.

Today, we should let the honourable Prime Minister, move the Bill and let us all debate and vote on Friday if it needs to go to the Third Reading and as some people have said, if whatever process is there, the final Amendment Bill comes to the Parliament for another debate and vote.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I ask the honourable Acting Attorney-General, let me make this clear. It is quite correct. Let me just say I endorse the statement that Professor Prasad raised. We are still at the periphery. This is an enabling motion that will allow, if possible, for the First Reading to be done. So, we accept that honourable Professor Prasad's point should be endorsed by or should be agreed to by everyone.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to give my contribution to the Suspension Motion that is before this august House. I totally agree that, at the moment, we are on the Suspension Motion. Just to clarify, I think in such debate, we should leave the Speaker's Office out because it is not the Speaker who has actually brought the Suspension Motion. It has been brought through the Business Committee, so it is still within the honourable Members. The honourable Speaker has not used his powers, under Standing Order 20, to bring in the Suspension Motion or to do a Ruling, so it is still between the honourable Members to decide whether we vote for or in against.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is what the honourable Professor Prasad said. I would agree with him, but to a certain extent. Why is there a need to bring this Suspension Motion? That is the argument at the moment. It can come as a normal process whereby a motion is moved by the honourable Prime Minister and present the Bill to Parliament under First Reading. Unfortunately, we are suspending the Standing Orders to allow the Speaker, and this is not a normal process. That is why I believe that we are actually trying to contribute towards the motion as to why it should go through or not on the merits, definitely.

This will come for Second Reading. Once it is moved, we will actually debate on the merits and the content, and this is something that we have said previously when the motion was put forward at that point in time, but this time we are given the content as to what is going to change. Last time, as Opposition, we were asking what is supposed to be changed. Last time, we were not given that information.

When we actually come to that stage whereby the honourable Prime Minister will move his motion under the First Reading, we will get a copy of the Bill stating what exactly needs to be changed. When we actually debate on it on Friday, it will be a totally different scenario to what it was when it was presented the last time because this time, we will have on-hand information as to what is going to change.

With regards to this particular motion, Mr. Speaker, I rise to show my objection to the motion moved by the Leader of the Government in Parliament. As I have stated, I would have loved to see it come in as a normal process whereby the honourable Prime Minister moves the motion without suspending anything because it is allowed as per the Standing Orders.

What we are witnessing today is not a routine procedural adjustment, it is a deeply alarming attempt to rewrite the supreme law of our nation through back door using parliamentary gymnastics to bypass the explicit text of the 2013 Constitution, and I am basing my argument on what I have said, that it should have come as a normal process.

The Government is asking us to suspend Standing Order 6(5) and Standing Order 92 to move the Constitution (Amendment) Bill of 2026. They attempt to justify this legally dubious manoeuvre by waving the August 2025 Supreme Court advisory opinion in our faces as if it were a magic wand.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must anchor ourselves to constitutional reality, not political convenience.

Let us be absolutely clear about the legal status of the Supreme Court intervention last year under Section 91(5) of the Constitution, that Cabinet is permitted to ask the Supreme Court for an advisory opinion. So, this is something that has been going around. Judgment and opinion and people have been asking the difference between an opinion and a judgment.

That is exactly what happened - the Supreme Court offered its advice on a rigid amendment threshold, Section 159 and 160, suggesting that a lower threshold of two-thirds parliamentary majority is a simple majority in referendum, could be deemed acceptable to break the legal deadlock. Again, same thing. What people are asking, if it is an opinion, if it can be taken as a judgment.

Because Cabinet went to Supreme Court asking for an opinion and it was an opinion that was provided. I stand to be corrected on this I am not a lawyer. But what was asked of me, I am asking this Parliament, and I think the honourable Acting Attorney-General will be speaking after this he can clarify this. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an advisory opinion is precisely an opinion, it is not a binding declarative judgment.

It was not a ruling resulting from a concrete dispute between litigating parties, while we respect the wisdom of the highest court, an advisory opinion does not possess the legislative power to physically erase and rewrite the entrance provision of the 2013 Constitution. This is another question that has been asked, Mr. Speaker, that in the Supreme Court, when we say Constitution, it is a document for the people, it should be by the people, and it should act in the favor for the people.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, I do agree. It is a living document. It needs to be changed; I am for that.

There are times when we need to change the Constitution, rightfully picked by honourable Vosarogo, that it's a living document, and with time it needs to change. I agree with that. I am not disputing that. But five Judges, do they have the legal authority to change the Constitution? That is a bigger question that is asked by the people.

As I am saying these are the questions that are raised on the ground that we need clarity. If we want to move forward in the future, we do not want this question to be raised again, what we are actually raising with regards, to the 2013 Constitution, we need to get our process right. So, these are some of the questions that are coming, that a particular group of people, do they have the mandate to change a Constitution or basically read down the Sections of the Constitution.

The plain text of Section 160 still requires a three-quarters majority of Parliament and the approval of three-quarters of all registered voters whether Supreme Court can or cannot amend the Constitution from the bench and the Government cannot use the advisory opinion as a legal shield to blatantly ignore the Supreme Law of the land, which is the Constitution at this point in time.

This brings us to the astounding arrogance of the motion to suspend Standing Order 6(5) for the benefit of this House and the people listening, Standing Order 6(5) exists as our ultimate procedural safeguard. It states clearly, to avoid doubt the suspension of any Standing Order does not permit the transaction of any business in breach of the Constitution or any other law. So, we are trying to move away, suspend it, to change the Constitution. According to the Constitution, that is not allowed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why then is the Government so desperate to suspend the specific safeguard? The answer is obvious. They know that by forcing this amendment Bill through under the new digitally advised but not constitutionally codified threshold, they are acting in breach of the strict letter of the 2013 Constitution. They are attempting to suspend the rule that prevents them from breaking the law so that they can break the law with parliamentary immunity. I am saying this, you will get a chance to clarify.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a dangerous legal fiction. The Constitution is supreme. We cannot bypass constitutional supremacy by simply voting to suspend the Standing Order that reminds you to obey it. If a parliamentary action breaches the Constitution, it is unconstitutional and invalid regardless to whether the Standing Order 6(5) is suspended. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we must strongly oppose the suspension of Standing Order 92...

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise on a Point of Order – Standing Order 62(1), he is imputing, saying we are going to break the law.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think that he is got a case. If you are in it, you know you are inferring that they are in fact going to breach the law. I mean, you would refer generally to the actions that may breach the law but not specifically to the people that you are referring to.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must strongly oppose the suspension of Standing Order 92. The Government's entire argument for amending the 2013 Constitution rests on the premise that they lack democratic legitimacy and public consultation when it was promulgated back in 2013.

Yet look at the action today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is basically, as I am saying, it is not about today, it is also about tomorrow. We might not be in Parliament tomorrow. We should not give a chance to the Parliament coming in tomorrow to question our actions that is going to take in this august House today. As I am saying, the Bill that is going to be presented is a totally different matter at the moment. I am talking about the procedure itself. Whether the procedure we are following to change the Constitution whether that is right or not, that is a separate matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have actually stated more than enough for this particular motion. I hope to hear from the Acting-Attorney General what he has to say before we take a side on this.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before the Acting Attorney-General takes the floor, lest we ourselves fall foul of the Standing Orders, and given the time, we will now entertain a suspension motion from the Leader of the Government, in the same Standing Order 6.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have two suspension motions with me, so I got confused between the two. This is the first time that I have faced this situation where we are discussing a suspension motion and then another suspension motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned, we need to complete the suspension motion that we have been discussing relating to Standing Order 6(5) and Standing Order 92.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I endorse the suspension motion.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is precisely why we have a suspension motion for the House to exercise its powers to discuss things that are outside the ambit of the Standing Orders.

MR. SPEAKER.- Your point is taken. Honourable Members, since there are no other intervention from the floor, I will call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE PROCEDURAL MOTION FOR THE CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2026

MR. SPEAKER.- We will proceed with the debate on the motion. I will now call on the honourable Acting Attorney for his contribution.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, honourable members of this House, I also acknowledge the members of the public in the gallery and those who are watching live. *Vinaka vakalevu ena nomuni vakadeitaka mo ni tiko e daidai.*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the Point of Order raised by the honourable members of the Opposition, and I thank them for raising it. Raising such concerns is their right. It is part of the care this House must take whenever it considers a Supreme Law.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Opposition did not raise a Point of Order. We were just debating the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order is taken and accepted.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I know he wants to interrupt. First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of honourable Maharaj, he actually has breached Standing Order 62(3). He referred to the members of the Supreme Court as a group of people. That is outrageous. Privileged Members, the Honourable Members of the Supreme Court, Standing Order 62(3), the conduct of members of the President, Chief Justice, who is the Chair of the Supreme Court, or President, members of the judiciary, or other persons acting in a judicial capacity must not be raised except on a motion with notice introduced with the Speaker's permission. In any other situation, reference to the conduct of any of these individuals is out of order.

I believe your reference to the members of the Supreme Court, the highest court of this nation, is quite embarrassing and I think that we have to admit that the Supreme Court has made a determination. Now I go into the real issue before us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we look at the proceedings of the Hansard Report, 11th of March 2025, and of course of your ruling, all the issues that we are deliberating today have been captured. You made a very important point, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And this is what I said to the members of the community. Because Government motion was dependent on Speaker's ruling, on the suspension. That we cannot bring any motion on the amendment of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we took a perceived interpretation, reading the amendment provision, Bill of Rights, and of course the Standing Order. You arrived at a conclusion that there was a contradiction. In my view, Sir, it is the same approach that was adopted by the Supreme Court in approaching the amendment of the provision. I agree with the honourable Professor Prasad. Why are you disputing the suspension? We have gone through this process. Let us go to Friday and debate it.

Honourable Premila Kumar raised a point about this side of the House, a Coalition. We came here through your 2013 Constitution. Why? The honourable Prime Minister is going to present, because we want to bring in a new Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all I want to do is just to amplify what has been clearly laid out by the leader, the honourable Vosarogo, honourable Kamikamica. The Standing Orders are read together with the Constitution's provisions on the amendment. The effect is clear. Certain matters of great importance to our people. This House is prevented even from beginning a conversation. The people's selected representatives are unable to give effect to the people's wishes. All these questions. I say this with respect of all who frame these rules. I believe we must ask in good governance, in good conscience, whether such restraint still serves our nation today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government established two commissions to listen to our people. The first reviewed our electoral system. The second reviewed our Constitution. Both commissions went to villages, towns, settlements, and both returned with the same clear message. A great many of our people have asked for change in the Constitution. This is the voice of the people. The House is the people's house. The Constitution is a people's document held by trust for us by them and the generations still to come.

The Constitution is not measured by how well it perceives change. It is measured by how it serves the people. The people have come in, filled the gallery, for the first time ever, Mr. Speaker, if I may note. This is the first time I have seen that the gallery is full. It is measured by how well it serves the people. How faithfully it protects their rights. How well it supports the services they depend on. And how wisely it uses the resources they entrust to us.

Where Constitutions fall short of that purpose, and I believe, 2013, of course, fall far short of the expectation of the people, there is no betrayal to improve it. It is an act of stewardship. The same care a family shows when it prepares how it will pass on to its children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the Government sought to amend the Constitution, a question was referred to the Supreme Court for its determination. The Court recognised that the amendment provisions set an exemplary high bar because we know where we are, on the intention that this Constitution is never, never, to be changed. *Me kakua ni veisau vakadua na Yavu ni Vakavulewa*. It is contrary to the principles of constitutional democracy.

The court recognised that the amendment provision set a high bar. As a result, the Court read

down the constitutional amendment requirements in Section 160 of the Constitution. This means that any Bill proposing a constitutional amendment as we are doing today (at both the Second and Third Reading), as well as the support of the simple majority of registered voters who actually cast their votes on the Bill.

That is the difference when we came the first time and this time around. It observed that the 2013 Constitution did not come into being through the participation and consent of the people. As honourable Vosarogo said democratically efficient. It also affirmed that a constitution, if it is to remain relevant and legitimate, must be capable of change. We received that guidance with gratitude and respect. It lights the path ahead of us.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an ancient principle of law holds that the welfare of the people is the highest law. I repeat, the ancient principle of law holds that the welfare of the people is the highest law. Our people have spoken with patience and in good faith. They are asking us to listen. They are asking us to open the door to a conversation they have long waited for.

I invite all honourable Members, on both sides of this House, to walk through that door together. Please support the motion. We should do so not as Government and Opposition, but as servant of the same people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion to suspend the Standing Orders.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for your patience. I hope that no yellow card or red card will be served as we progress with the proceedings today.

I will just be very simple and very brief, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We fully understand and let me assure the Government that we are not here to prevent Parliament from discharging its responsibilities. We have heard the issues raised by the speakers from the Government. But this is something that we raised from the beginning in our earlier discussion with the Government outside this Parliament because it is a matter of adherence to the law. That was the point that we made, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Laws are interpreted differently, but that was the point that we raised then when we had the initial discussion with Government because, first, the Government has the responsibility to ensure that whatever it does is within the parameters of our existing laws. We pointed out in that meeting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that if the Government does not adhere to that, then it is the responsibility of the Opposition to raise it and, of course, to set a good example as well, we will do our best to stick within the law itself as well.

Otherwise, it will be to you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and Government has decided about that. But we still remain firm on this issue. The honourable Attorney- General, Acting Attorney-General, has stated that the Standing Orders and the Constitution are to be read together. This is exactly the point. These aspects of the suspension are linked to the provisions of the Constitution in terms of the amendment. That is the point that we wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I know that the senior lawyer from this side will speak after this. But the other point that I wish to make here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the way forward, as alluded to by the honourable Kamikaica. This is the point that I wish to make here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is in terms of the way forward, as alluded to by the Deputy Prime Minister, the honourable Kamikamica.

This is my observation after being in Parliament for the last 12 years, in democracy it is a game of numbers. Once we have the numbers, we rely on it in order to get the issues through. I

would urge this Parliament that trust is the most important thing in all this. It is about building stronger relationships outside this House and in this House. Given our past, this is not we will debate the Constitution later in the Second Reading and the Third Reading, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I have stated it already in the debate in this House, this is a very sensitive document, and we must approach it with wisdom and approach it cautiously. As I have said, numbers, tyranny of the majority. We can do whatever we want, but let us build relationships, because trust is important, and our responsibility as leaders is to lead by example: one, operating within the law, and two, let us build these relationships because the people whom we serve, look up to us. That is something I want to leave on the floor, not only for this motion, but for the future, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a Point of Order, with the reference to Standing Order 62(3) as raised by the honourable Acting Attorney-General, if my reference to his Lordship and the Panel of Judges of the Supreme Court was offensive, I would like to apologise to his Lordship and the Panel of Judges, and I withdraw that particular statement.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said, but very eloquently too, from both sides of the House. I think a good start point for me would be to probably reiterate what the honourable Prasad has actually said. We ought not to be arguing about the merits of what is in the Bill, we ought not to be arguing about anything for the suspension motion and parliamentary procedures. We all know, we have a set of Standing Orders, and those Standing Orders came about in this transition from each Parliament. These Standing Orders came about for this particular four years of Parliament.

What needs to be realised is that, as an institution, we are bound to obey what we signed off to. The only way that the Standing Orders can be deviated from one way is, if under section 20, you do so or you allow us to do so. Case in point is the fact that when you bring a suspension motion, Section 6(3) of the Standing Orders basically says, ‘No amendment to a suspension motion may be moved and no debate is allowed on it.’ However, by inference, we invited the debate, so we are debating it. Under section 20, that would be the case. That is one portion.

The other portion is – I say all these because it will all come into perspective – that there is a particular provision within the Standing Orders with respect to Bills. I think it finishes around Standing Order 90, and it starts at Standing Order 83. So, in Standing Order 83(1), it is outlined as legislative procedures and I want to read it. It says and I quote, “...a Minister may introduce a Bill, but only the Minister responsible for Finance or other Minister authorised by Cabinet may introduce a Money Bill.” Standing Order 83(2) reads, and I quote: “...a Member may only introduce a private Bill providing that the Standing Order 94 is complied with by the Member.”

In order to encapsulate both, I am talking about the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, if it comes via a normal way, Standing Order 83(3) says, and I quote:

“...No less than two days before the Sitting day at which the Bill is intended to be read, the Minister or a member as the case may be must -

- (a) give notice to the Secretary-General of his or her intention to introduce the Bill; and
- (b) publish a notice of the Bill together with a copy of the Bill in the Gazette.”

My question is, to the honourable Attorney-General, was that done? Since you are about to present the Bill to the House. Was that done? Have we now fallen on foul of our own procedures, because that ought to have been gazetted by virtue of the very same Standing Orders that we are talking about.

Now, a lot has been said, and you can see the commencement of this, procedurally, we are actually doing things that are defective. Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is being asked for in this Suspension Motion, and again, it is just a Suspension Motion in Standing Order 6(5) is basically, that particular provision be suspended. They are asking for suspension of Standing Order 6(5) and Standing Order 92 so as to allow the honourable Prime Minister to proceed with the First Reading of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill. What is in it? No one still knows, say for the Government side. Not all of the Government either.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is something that needs to be said, and I think that comes on the back of what has been said by the people. I do not want to refer to the Supreme Court decision because that is something that will come at a later stage. But if you are going to use and talk about what has actually happened and the Advisory Opinion that has been given by the Supreme Court, with respect to the watering down of the provisions of three-quarter down to two-third, you must also, at the same time, remember that the Supreme Court gave the tick to this very Constitution. Whatever that has transpired before, that very same Supreme Court had said that that Constitution is lawful and valid.

Once it says it is lawful and valid, you also need to look at the fact that if you knew that you were about to bring provisions to amend the constitution, why was not an interpretation sought or guidance sought with respect to the provisions that are in it that prohibit the amendments to the ones that you are actually trying to do. I will tell you why, because if you read Standing Order 6(5), it literally says of the Standing Orders to avoid doubt, the suspension of any Standing Order does not permit the transaction of any business in breach of the Constitution or any other law.

Now, the Constitution has been given its validity. You have to think very deeply about this. What you are telling the general public is that you want to do something that maybe again I say this, with a qualification, Sir, that may be in breach of the Constitution by actually foregoing and suspending that particular provision.

If you knew you wanted to amend the particular part of it, then when you went to the Supreme Court, you ought to have asked, planning. You do not plan, if you do not look at what you are going to do, you are going to fail. These are questions that really need to be answered before you actually come to this House or prestigiously, you can stand here and pontificate about following the rules and law and order, et cetera, all that.

We all understand it. We all understand the rule and the law. At the end of the day, the first port of call for all of us is the Supreme Court has given a decision, which is an Advisory, but the constitute and about the Constitution, and the Constitution is the Bill. The Supreme Court has given a decision, which is an advisory, and about the Constitution, and the Constitution is the be-all and the end-all at the moment, right until it's amended and for those that are actually speaking about, oh, this is a Constitution that never could be amended, that is incorrect, Sir.

There are provisions in the Constitution with respect to amendment It was tried. It was only failed by one vote, Sir. You cannot say that so, nevertheless, opinion sought, opinion given. But my point, Sir, is that you are actually looking at taking out subsection 5 of 6, and you are actually looking at taking out 92. Now, if we all think about it, it also talks about, 92 is specifically talking about Bills that are out of order.

It is in English a bill that the Constitution does not allow Parliament to address is out of order and may not be introduced. And it lists the kinds of Bills that actually cannot be brought, that is out of order. But the provision to amend it, like honourable Maharaj said, it would have come normally we could have thought about the issue about it later.

It could have come normally. You did not have to do this suspension, because what that does effectively is plant in everybody's head exactly what the actual exclusion says, what is being done here. And we are not sure, Sir, we are not privy to the bill. Nobody is. I hear a lot of mumbling, Sir, but we are not privy to it.

We are not privy to it. I understand it is going to be presented today, if I am correct. In that case, why was it not gazette as it is supposed to? Two days before? Two days before? Procedurally, I do not think I need to prolong anything else, because sometimes the *laveliga* squad gossip too fast. Mr. Speaker, from this side of the House, we will fight what we have to fight. We will speak about what needs to be spoken about with respect to the changes and amendments.

Amendments to constitutions are allowed this one did allow it, whatever proceeded, that all comes at a later stage that will all come at a later stage. Right now, we are totally against the procedure that is being followed to actually do this. And for those particular reasons, Sir, I think enough has been said by all the other speakers from the Opposition.

I wholeheartedly also agree with what honourable Prasad is saying, that this is not the forum for any other argument, except for the suspension motion. We do not support the suspension motion from this side of the House. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER.- Honourable Koya, I think just for clarification, the two days you talked about was meant. So, I think my understanding of the Secretary-General, they had warned them that on Sunday, the notice has to be made.

Give it two days for it to, in accordance with the rule, with Standing Order 83. Thank you. Any more intervention? I do not see any. I will now call on the leader of the government to speak in reply

HON. RO F. Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. I thank the honourable Members for your contributions today in this important motion for suspension of Standing Order 6-5 and 92, in order to proceed with the motion by the honourable Prime Minister on the Constitution Amendment. Just to close with some comments, I would like to emphasise that government is following due process and that's already alluded to by our honourable Members.

Government's intentions are noble and very transparent as far as constitutional amendment is concerned. The transparency and openness include the suspension motion before us in terms of following due processes, following the law, following the Standing Orders. We could have done different things, for example, creating a legal vacuum. Even some of our supporters are saying, throw out the Constitution (*viritaka i tuba na yavu ni vakavulewa qori*). However, as a government, we are very responsible in following the law, 2013 Constitution in the interpretations required in order to move to this stage.

I note the honourable Leader of the Opposition, mentioned of creating trust as we move forward, creating an environment where we are able to converse and to interact. When we were in the Opposition, it was very hard to speak to some of the Members in Government at that time; it was very difficult. We used to pass each other like we did not know each other. Even though some of us when we were at USP together in the halls of residence for three to four years, we could not speak to each other but after the election right now, we are able to interact, talk to each other and we have already created a good environment of political trust as we move forward, a political goodwill. For this Government we will continue to do that. Even honourable Ketan Lal, expresses a few sentiments here and there about everything but we continue to converse. If that was done in the last government,

it would be a different story. Let us move forward together. We have created that environment as already alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

In terms of the 2013 Constitution and Standing Orders of course it is a symbiotic relationship. One depends on the other, we cannot move forward without suspending some of the provisions of one or the other which we have worked in terms of the Supreme Court interpretation and today in terms of the Standing Order suspension motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that, I again thank the honourable Members, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and his team, and our Government side, for their contributions. That is the essence of democracy - we express our views, we move forward and we vote as democracy. I look forward, as we continue from this stage on to the next, in terms of collaboration as a nation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now proceed to vote.

Question put.

Vote cast:

Ayes	-	36
Noes	-	13
Not Voted	-	3
Abstained	-	1

Motion agreed to.

CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2026

HON. S. L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the honourable Members for their vote to allow me to move to this stage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the purpose of Section 160 of the Constitution and pursuant to Standing Order 84(1), I move:

That the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Bill No. 32/2026), be now read the first time.

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

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

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

Honourable Members, until such time as the honourable Prime Minister will give notice for the Second Reading, I encourage all honourable Members to utilise the time to peruse the Bill and prepare for debate, which will focus on the principles and the merits of the Bill. I thank you all honourable Members.

Just to pass the time, I will talk about my taxi driver. Yesterday morning, he informed me of the Inter District Competition (IDC) which is held here in Suva, and I think the defending champion

is Rewa, and they did very poorly, as you see from the regional. So, Ba is the champion that they are hoping will take the shield and represent the country at the next regional meeting. That is a story from my taxi driver.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today and I thank you all for your contribution and Parliament will adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.53 p.m.