Fiji Labour Party

Annual Delegates Conference
Skylodge Hotel, Nadi
29 November 2025

Activities Report 2025

Its been a hectic year for the Party. While we have begun gearing up for next year's general elections, keeping the Rabuka Coalition government accountable to the people was a massive task as it hopped from one scandal to another or some other shenanigans. Rarely a week passed without a new sordid episode in the life of the Coalition.

Much of its ills stemmed from bad leadership policies and decisions that showed scant respect for the rule of law or the principles of good governance and ministerial integrity. Labour has been a strong voice both in exposing and criticising a lot of the malpractices.

As 2025 dawned, the Coalition obviously realized that two years of its tenure in office had been misspent junketing around the globe wasting taxpayer funds while the serious business of governance had lagged way behind.

In another year it would face accountability at the polls with little to show for its four-year term except mounting cost of living and increasing hardship for the ordinary people, a critically depressed health care service and crumbling infrastructure.

So 2025 saw the introduction of a number of important developments that took up a great deal of the time of the Secretariat. The more important among these:

- the setting up of the Law Reform Commission to consider much-needed amendments to the Electoral Laws
- the Supreme Court referral by the government seeking to dilute the double guarantee provisions governing amendments to the 2013 Constitution.
- the Commission of Inquiry report into the "rot' surrounding the appointment of Barbara Malimali as Commissioner FICAC.

  The repercussions of the COI report itself created a whole new set of controversial developments eventually ending in the dismissal of Malimali and Attorney General Graham Leung and much later the resignations of the two Deputy Prime Ministers, Minister for Trade and Commerce Manoa Kamikamica and Finance Minister Biman Prasad following criminal charges laid against them by FICAC.
- Then there was the on-again off-again drama surrounding the much promised Municipal Council elections which as the year began to draw to a close ended up as yet another failed promise, without a word from the government on what to expect.

- The continued decline of the sugar industry was another source of major concern as FSC's failures led to a series of financial disasters for cane growers.
- Economic front: Vatukoula Gold Mines and the Sugar Industry
- The appalling state of Health care facilities

Supreme Court referral

The Labour Party was invited by the Chief Justice along with Unity Fiji to participate in the Supreme Court referral case regarding the provisions governing the amendments to the 2013 Constitution.

A great deal of time of the Secretariat went into assisting our Counsel prepare the case for the Party. The Cabinet had filed a case seeking the Supreme Court's opinion on the amendment provisions in Chapters 11 and 12 which required a three-quarter majority in Parliament as well as in a referendum Cabinet argued that the provision was difficult to satisfy because of its double super majority requirements thus rendering the Constitution unamendable, despite even the will of the people.

In short, Cabinet was seeking an opinion which would favour reducing the existing 75% double super majority requirement from three-quarters to two-thirds and a simple majority in a referendum.

On 29 August, the Supreme Court delivered its opinion reducing the voting requirement in the House to two/thirds and in a referendum to a simple majority.

The Opinion confirmed that the 1997 Constitution was no longer valid and that the 2013 Constitution was the supreme law of the land. It also confirmed that the immunity clauses of the Constitution were entrenched and could not be changed for the sake of stability.

Prime Minister Rabuka has since said a Cabinet sub-committee had been appointed to look at changes to the Constitution. Labour has always maintained that any proposed changes to the 2013 Constitution must be clearly outlined, followed by thorough consultations with the people.

Labour's key concerns are the protection of minority rights, retention of equal citizenry and the common name of 'Fijian' for all citizens irrespective of their ethnicity, and religious freedom.

Nonetheless, we submitted that there were provisions which needed to be reviewed particularly those that restricted fundamental freedoms and political and civil rights of citizens.

Electoral Law Reform

In February 2025, the Coalition government announced its intention to carry out a major review of Fiji's Electoral Laws to be undertaken by the Fiji Law Reform Commission.

The review would consider the The Electoral Act 2014, The Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act 2012 and the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding & Disclosures) Act 2013.

Current Electoral Laws have been highly unpopular and Labour had worked with other Opposition Parties prior to the 2022 general elections seeking amendments to the more objectionable aspects of the Electoral Laws such as the D'Hondt Electoral system which creates one large constituency, a major departure from Fiji's traditional system of multiple single member constituencies.

In March, a 4-member Committee was set up as part-time Commissioners headed by former CJ Judge Daniel Fatiaki to consult widely on the issue and make recommendations to the Law Reform Commission.

The three other members were academic and former NFP MP, Dr. Wadan Narsey, lawyer Diedre Brooks and former NFP general secretary and lawyer Seini Nabou. After wide consultations, the committee submitted its report to the FLRC in July.

Labour made comprehensive submissions to the committee. One of the commissioners wrote subsequently to commend the Party for its submission.

We pointed out that a number of objectionable provisions of the electoral laws cannot be amended without first making the enabling changes to the Constitution. It would otherwise be like putting the cart before the horse.

The following are Labour's key recommendations:

- Repeal the consequential amendment to s116 of the Electoral Act which requires political parties and candidates to immediately provide a written explanation to say how promises made during an election campaign will be funded. We submitted that this was a ridiculous requirement. It is not for the ruling party to criminalise campaign issues through draconian provisions.

- Repeal of s6 of the Electoral Act which confers extraordinary powers on the Supervisor of Elections to obtain confidential information, This is unconstitutional

- Composition of Parliament – a single legislative chamber comprising 55 members elected via single-member constituencies determined by a Constitutional Boundaries Commission

- Voting Method – Alternative Vote similar to that under the 1997 Constitution; Labour recommends moving away from the current Leader-centred proportional system as it deters the emergence and development of younger leaders. It also throws up ridiculous results with MPS with 300 or less votes ending up being Cabinet ministers

- Conduct of Elections – we should revert to the system prevailing before the imposition of the 2013 Constitution and the 2014 Electoral Decree. A week long elections with vote counting done at centralised locations in the 4 administrative regions

- Ballot Papers – should bear serial numbers. Labour called for complete transparency in the printing and handling of ballot papers and in the preparation of Ballot Paper Accounts both National and at individual Polling Stations; Party symbols and names of candidates should be printed on the ballot paper.

- Nomination Deposit – be reduced from $1000 to $250 per candidate

- Women representation – Labour believes in fair representation for women. It proposed that 30% of the 55 seats be reserved for women.

Grant to Political Parties

We raised this issue with the Committee as it is a discriminatory and totally unscrupulous scheme, never heard of before in Fiji's parliamentary history. It was done surreptitiously without any mention in the 2023/24 Budget address.

The Parliamentary Budget was doubled from $8m to $16 to facilitate the payout. Under the scheme each political party in Parliament now receives an annual grant of $325,000 disguised as "parliamentary expenses such as staffing and other recurring expenses".

The explanation is absurd as such parliamentary expenses of political parties are paid from the Parliament Budget allocation.

Labour wrote to the Secretary-General to Parliament in protest. We had also taken up the issue with the Electoral Commission. To date neither of them have responded.

Political parties not in parliament will therefore be at a distinct disadvantage financially in the lead up to the general elections in 2026.

Government grants to Media organisations

This is another obnoxious development – the $1.7m grant to Communications Fiji Ltd for a period of 14 months ending July 2026 under the guise of providing Public Service Broadcast. Mai TV received a lesser grant of $500,000. Both of them are privately owned commercial media organisations.

The payout is preposterous and tantamount to "buying the media". They can no longer be viewed as independent and impartial in their coverage of news.

And, indeed, ever since the payout Communications Fiji Ltd networks have become rather circumspect when running Labour statements that are critical of the government.

Another government propaganda machine is the State-funded Fiji Broadcasting Commission which simply does not run Labour's media statements.

A pro-government media which lacks balance and impartiality in news coverage, places opposition parties such as Labour at a distinct disadvantage going into next year's polls. With the CFL news network, FBC and Mai TV Labour now gets virtually no coverage unless it is negative publicity. This goes against the media code of ethics and is not an indication of a free and independent media.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Fiji Labour Party had, undoubtedly, played a key role in the setting up of the Commission. While it is not a new issue since some other parties had also mooted this in their election campaigns, Labour had strongly advocated the setting up of such a Commission during the Reconciliation process initiated by the Methodist Church of Fiji at the time of the 2023 Girmit celebrations.

Leaders and members of the Labour government, Party officials, supporters and activists have been victims of all four coups. Labour MPs and Senators were held hostage at gunpoint in Parliament for 56 days by George Speight and his thugs in 2000.

The Commissioners were appointed in January this year. It took several months to set up the office before it began holding interviews with the people.

The Party will make submissions to the TRC once PM Rabuka has appeared before it to give his account of why and on whose instructions he carried out the 1987 coup, thus unleashing the coup culture that has plagued Fiji's development for almost four decades.

The TRC is required to hand in its final report to the President in February 2027.

The Ashton-Lewis Commission of Inquiry (COI Report)

The events leading to the setting up of the Commission of Inquiry now widely referred to as COI) and its subsequent report this year, beginning with the highly controversial appointment of Barbara Malimali as Commissioner FICAC on 5 September 2024, kept the Party Secretariat on its toes for most of the year.

The "rot" surrounding the appointment is well known and does not need recapping. The subsequent findings of the COI report and its major recommendations centred around some high powered players including at least two key Cabinet Ministers and members of the judiciary and the legal fraternity.

It was a scandalous affair with Labour leading the charge in demanding that the report be released for public consumption and those cited for criminal acts be investigated and charged, if there was sufficient evidence.

For months Prime Minister Rabuka dilly-dallied in characteristic fashion before making a redacted copy of the report public. By then, however, the full report had been leaked.

Labour continued to put pressure on the authorities, through Facebook postings and media statements, to investigate and charge those named in wrong doing. Our stand was that the rule of law must prevail at all times.

The PM had acted fairly promptly in dismissing Barbara Malimali and Attorney General Graham Leung. But took his time taking action against the other "crocodiles" just saying that the Police were investigating.

It was not until late October that Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Commerce Manoa Kamikamica was charged and had to resign. A week later in early November Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Biman Prasad was charged by FICAC and also had to resign. Both have appeared in court and set free on bail.

However, this is an on-going saga with the government facing a number of judicial challenges in the aftermath of the COI report from those adversely implicated by it. These proceedings are likely to spill well into the election year and has created an element of instability and apprehension.

Leading the fight back is the Judicial Service Commission. It has hired private lawyers seeking a judicial review to nullify the recommendations and findings of the COI Report.

Suspended FICAC Commissioner, Barbara Malimali has taken the Prime Minister and the President to court, seeking a judicial review of her suspension, and claiming $2m for her dismissal.

Also seeking a judicial review of the Ashton-Lewis findings are the former Attorney General Graham Leung and Fiji Law Society President Wylie Clarke.

Sugar Industry

On the economic front, much of our time was devoted to exposing the shenanigans within the sugar industry as it continues to spin downwards with the extremely worrying malperformance of the two Viti Levu mills.

The Lautoka Mill has had a troubling season registering very high TCTS of 15 throughout the season so far. There have also been frequent mill breakdowns.

A TCTS of 15 means heavy losses to cane farmers as it now takes 15/16 tonnes of cane to make a tonne of sugar. There is so far no talk of compensating growers for such financial losses.

To compound matters, the Rarawai Mill had to shut down half way through the season after a devastating fire in its engine room on 17 September. This put additional pressure on the already-troubled Lautoka Mill as it was now forced to handle all the remaining cane in Viti Levu - some 400,000 tonnes waiting to be harvested.

Once again Labour took up the issue worrying about the immediate fate of mill workers losing jobs as a result of the mill shutdown.

We also claimed FSC had aggravated the fire damage through sheer negligence and incompetence as what began as a spark from the engine room, quickly engulfed the entire area inflamed by layers of bagasse lying on the floor. Bagasse should be removed regularly.

Labour took up the case for the workers maintaining that they should not be victimised for FSC's failures and malpractices.

The Rarawai disaster has also put additional burden on cane farmers who now have to cart their cane all the way from Raki Raki, Tavua and Ba to Lautoka for crushing. This is causing them unnecessary hassle and costs. While government is paying cartage rates, these were set way back in 2016, and are now totally inadequate to cover true costs.

The situation has also had a devastating impact on lorries delivering cane to Lautoka as they are now waiting extremely long hours, anywhere from 12-36 hours, to unload their lorries. This created a humanitarian crisis with the waiting drivers receiving no assistance or relief from either FSC or the government, even though they are not responsible for the crisis.

Once again it was Labour and the National Farmers Union acting with the Cane Lorry Drivers Association from Ba and Lautoka who provided humanitarian relief. At our own cost, assisted by sympathetic donors, we set up a tent on vacant land adjacent to the mill, courtesy of the Lautoka City Council, to provide shelter and some light meals for these lorry drivers. They now have a place where they can rest, have tea and bread in the morning and a light meal in the evenings as they wait to unload.

Such disasters during the 2025 crushing season have served to expose the insensitivity and inadequacies of the executive management and the Board of FSC and the Sugar Ministry.

The Sugar Minister himself has come under strong criticism from Labour for his inability to handle crisis situations. He has also come under fire for his numerous junkets around the globe, ostensibly in the hunt for a new sugar mill for Ra, with nothing to show for these trips.

Labour has also continued to raise concerns about the financial burden placed on growers by exorbitant rent increases and premium demands for lease renewals which are now no longer based on the formula set in the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA). The land situation is extremely troubling with hundreds of leases set to expire in the next five of years with no assurance of renewal.

This uncertainty coupled with mounting costs and other industry setbacks have sapped confidence in the future of cane cultivation and growers are leaving the industry in large numbers.

It is clear that current industry executives lack the vision and the foresight necessary to arrest the critical decline and come up with strategies to revive Sugar.

Labour has been calling for an all-industry conference to address the crisis but so far apart from rhetoric, nothing else has happened. PM Rabuka announced last month that a Stakeholders conference will be called to address the problems in the industry.

Vatukoula Gold Mines

Developments at the gold mines this year have also been of serious concern to Labour. Despite the gravity of its implications for the national economy and the local workforce at the mines, we have been a lone voice in denouncing developments there.

The Mines Minister himself has been closely connected to these unsavoury developments. And is known to be deeply involved with the Chinese investors of Vatukoula Gold Mines. Surprisingly, the Parliamentary Opposition and other political/economic observers have taken little note of these serious developments at the mine.

To put it briefly, late February/March this year, Labour exposed that several container loads of gold ore concentrates were stored at a yard in Lautoka awaiting shipment to China for processing there.

Our inquiries revealed that the Director of Mineral Resources was not aware that gold ore concentrates had left Vatukoula, contrary to regulations and security requirements, waiting to be shipped out. We had received reports that some containers had already been quietly shipped to china, but this could not be verified.

The Ministry tried to downplay the scandal in response to our Media statements exposing the scam. The contents of the containers were then reportedly checked in Lautoka by FRCA, examined and weighed by Ministry officials and security.

The worry here is that Fiji has always exported gold dore, and not raw concentrates. The switch in exports to gold ore concentrate lacks transparency and accountability.

It is an adverse development, vis a vis the economy, and raises important questions. For instance, how can we verify with any certainly just how much gold dore was made in China from the concentrates exported?

This has implications in terms of taxes charged as well as the payment of royalties to landowners, and revenue for the country.

At a time when gold values are at a record high, this is highly troubling and should have been so to the Coalition government – the Mineral Resources and Finance Ministries, in particular. Yet they tried to mislead the nation through their statements.

The Chinese company is digging deeper, extending the mining area and is bringing in workers from China. Our local workers are being put on restricted hours. The dilapidated staff quarters at the mines have been renovated to house the Chinese recruits.

The adverse development at Vatukoula continues to be a cause of much anxiety and needs a thorough investigation as to what exactly is happening there.

Fiji's crumbling Heath Facilities

This is another critical area that Labour has taken up strong advocacy on.

On his visits to the West or the North, Leader has made a point of visiting hospitals to meet with patients and has been appalled at the shocking state of most of our hospitals – Tavua, Savusavu and Labasa in particular.

Labour has also been highly critical of a 25% increase in government grant in the 2025/26 Budget to the Aspen joint venture company – Health Care Fiji Ltd – that manages the Ba and Lautoka Hospitals.

Aspen's grant went up by $27m from $90m to $117m at a time when it is cutting back on services to the public. Aspen has stopped dispensing free medicine from its outpatient department in Lautoka and Ba. Plus, at a recent media forum held in Ba by the government there were numerous complaints about Aspen refusing to see patients sending them instead to nearby Health clinics.

This has caused much inconvenience to our sick and elderly – putting them at extra expense and forcing them to travel long distances to get their prescriptions met. The move has come strongly under criticism also from the Fiji Pharmaceutical Society as well as the Fiji Medical Association. They claimed that the health clinics do not stock much of the life saving drugs and other serious medicines forcing mainly the rural community to go to the extra expense and mile to procure such supplies.

In response to Labour Leader's demand for explanations, ex-Finance Minister Biman Prasad had said that the increased funding was the payment government makes to Aspen for treating patients at the two hospitals. This seems somewhat questionable when after the increase in the Budget, there have been so many complaints of patients being re-directed to government Health clinics.

There are other aspects of the $27m increased funding to Aspen which need to be looked at. Labour has been asking for a thorough investigation into how and why the increase was granted.

Municipal Elections

Labour and Unity Fiji entered into an agreement to contest the municipal elections jointly. Labour's negotiations to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding was led by President Monica Raghwan and Board member Satish Kumar. A lot of time and effort had gone into this and planning for the council elections until it became clear that the Coalition government had no intention of holding municipal elections despite their election promises. The MOU was subsequently annulled by mutual consent.

General Elections 2026

The Party placed an advertisement in the Fiji Times on Saturday 26 September calling for expressions of interest from persons wishing to contest the elections on a Labour ticket. The same ad was placed on our Facebook page. We have received some interesting applications and interviewed some of those who applied.

The ad will be repeated from time to time. Besides this, the Secretariat has been head-hunting for candidates with good credentials who have shown interest but may not apply to media advertisements.

Reactivation of Branches

A special effort was made by the Secretariat in 2025 to reactivate all the district Branches and direct them to engage in membership recruitment drives so as to have properly organized and functioning Branches.

Much work was done on this and all districts in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu except two, now have interim Branch officials who have been directed to engage in membership drive.

Secretary-General held committee meetings and reactivated the following branches, electing interim committees to organise membership drive and convene larger meetings of members to formalise the Branches:

Lautoka - 15 June
Sigatoka - 6 August, 15 October
Ra - 13 September
Ba - 21 September
Savusavu - 24 October
Labasa - 25 October
Tavua - 9 November

The Secretariat will follow up on programs for the formalisation of the listed Branches.

Apart from this the Secretary-General has travelled extensively holding pocket meetings, mustering support and talking to key Party supporters throughout the country – Navua, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Ra, Nausori, Nasinu, Savusavu and Labasa.

Recently, a meeting was held to consult with business leaders from the West. Another such meeting is being organised for the near future.

We are also pushing Board members and Branch officials to actively pursue a membership drive. This needs to be stepped up.

Social Media

I am happy to report that our Facebook Page is doing extremely well. The Secretariat's investigative pieces on Vatukoula, the exposure regarding the Polytech and Aspen funding, the strong criticism of the Coalition's lack of respect for the rule of law, double standards and indiscriminate flouting of constitutional provisions have resulted in increased following for the Party.

We have also strongly taken up social issues such as the cost of living crisis and the critical state of health care services etc.

Many of our postings are now hitting tens of thousands with some going well beyond 100,000. The majority of those going in are non-followers which means we are reaching out to the unconverted, so to speak.

I entreat our members, particularly those on the Management Board and Branch officials, to tap into our FB to keep abreast with the Party's official views on issues of national interest. This is essential as we head into the elections so that our views and policies can be effectively disseminated to the people at large. The more you share with your own friends and colleagues, the better our outreach will be.

The Party also has an official website which provides information on the Party, its formation and founding principles, policies, and history. Important reports and submissions are posted on the website and it has access to our FB posts.

I take this opportunity to thank all our well wishers who have helped build up our Facebook postings and have contributed with information, data and ideas.

Fundraising

I have time and again underscored the importance of ensuring that the Party has sufficient finances to carry out its activities and prepare for the elections.
I am happy to report that a beginning was made in this direction with the Central Division, Nadi and Labasa holding their fundraising events for 2025 as follows:

Nadi - 2 August 2025
Central Division - 3 August 2025
Labasa - 25 October

A total of $20,300 was raised from these events.

Executive Meetings

During the period under review, four Management Board meetings were held at the Party headquarters in Suva, as follows: 12 February, 18 June, 8 October and 26 November.

A **National Council** meeting was held in Nadi on 29 March 2025 at the Blue Village Hotel.

The **Annual Delegates Conference** was originally planned to be held on 25 July 2025 together with the celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the Party as proposed by the Management Board in its meeting of 12 February 2025.

However, for a number of reasons the conference and the celebrations were deferred to November. A major reason for this was preoccupation of the Secretariat with preparing the submissions to the Electoral Law Reform Commission and the Supreme Court Referral case on Constitutional amendments. Work on the latter did not conclude until mid-August.

It was thus not possible to organise the Conference by 25th July, as also the planned meeting of the National Council on 5th July.

The Management Board meeting of 18 June decided that the ADC and the 40th Anniversary celebrations be deferred to November 2025. As the date drew closer logistical problems surfaced in organising it in the Central Division, as also combining the conference with the 40th Anniversary celebrations.

It was eventually agreed by the Management Board to hold the Conference in Nadi where suitable venues were available, and to defer the anniversary celebrations.

Conclusion

I have endeavoured to summarise the activities of the Secretariat as best as I could.

Although district branches have been reactivated, there is much to be done to get their activities and administrative functions properly organised to be compatible with the requirements of the FLP Constitution. This can be better done by appointing full-time co-ordinators in the various divisions who would take the responsibility for oversighting the Branches and reporting to the Headquarters. Again, this boils down to financial resources at our disposal.

Looking at the reckless manner in which Fiji is currently governed where corruption is rife, where political patronage can be bought in exchange for financial gain, where ethics accountability and transparency in governance have been kicked into oblivion – Fiji's only hope lies in a return of Labour to save the nation and give them a government they truly deserve.

A government that will replace despair with hope and restore their confidence in the future of our beloved country.

I would like to thank all who have supported us in our cause. The hard-working people of our nation deserve better.

May God Bless Fiji.

Mahendra Pal Chaudhry
<u>**General Secretary/Leader**</u>