UniFiji Watch

The University of Fiji
(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

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The University helped bring art and craft to the community, supporting a five-day workshop in Suva organised by the Indian High Commission on the theme of celebrating creativity and preserving tradition. Participants took the chance to learn techniques of weaving and painting – particularly the Madhubani form form of the art – and screen painting and bottle painting.

Northern boost for university

THE University of Fiji is strengthening its commitment to the Northern Division with the development of its new Labasa Campus, aimed at bringing quality, accessible and affordable higher education closer to students and communities in Vanua Levu.

Vice Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem said the vision behind the Labasa Campus was to expand tertiary education to the North and respond to the demand from students in the region.

She said many students from Labasa were already studying at the University but were required to travel to Viti Levu and find accommodation in Suva or Saweni.

"The opening of our campus in Labasa will allow us to take education to where the students have expressed demand."

Assistant Registrar Ms Nikhat said the campus would also help reduce some of the financial and personal challenges for students who previously had to move to Viti Levu.

Planned facilities include modern teaching and learning spaces, lecture and tutorial rooms, computer and IT facilities, library and learning resources, student support services and administrative facilities.

Students urged to act in face of national HIV emergency

By Risha Maharaj & Avitesh Ram

THE University of Fiji is continuing urgent efforts to get students to protect themselves against HIV amid the national emergency declared after cases soared around the country.

Government figures show that one in 60 adults are living with HIV, and 1,700 new HIV cases are being recorded in Fiji each year, according to information presented at the Pacific HIV Symposium 2026 in August.

For students and staff at UniFiji, the national HIV situation is particularly relevant because universities play an important role in providing young people with accurate health information, encouraging responsible decision-making and connecting students with confidential support.

An HIV awareness programme was launched around International Youth Day in early August, following an earlier university programme in April that included free and confidential screening for students.

The university's awareness efforts are also intended to ensure students understand the risks associated with HIV and know where to seek assistance when they have concerns about their health.

The August symposium, held at the Sheraton resort, Denarau, highlighted the need for greater awareness, regular HIV testing, improved access to treatment and stronger harm-reduction services.

Dr Dashika Balak, Principal Medical Officer and public health specialist at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, said research showed that people who inject drugs account for 48% of people starting antiretroviral treatment in Fiji.

The research also identified links between people who inject drugs, key populations and the wider public through genetic sequencing, indicating connections between HIV transmission associated with drug injection and sexual transmission.

The figures also point to a significant challenge in ensuring people living with HIV receive appropriate care.

Fiji recorded approximately 3.3 new HIV infections per 1,000 adults in 2025, while only about 22% of people living with HIV were receiving antiretroviral treatment.

University authorities have been warning students about the dangers of HIV and the importance of taking preventive measures.

For students seeking help, Student Counselling Services can provide an important first point of contact. Counselling and appropriate referral services can help students access further information and support while maintaining confidentiality.

The role of peer support is also important. The Fiji Network for Positive People (FJN+) supports people living with HIV through peer support, counselling, advocacy and outreach.

Rusiate Naulunimagiti, Peer Counselling Manager at FJN+, has highlighted the importance of peer-led outreach in supporting people who are newly diagnosed with HIV.

For the university community, the issue is not simply about statistics. HIV awareness involves understanding how HIV is transmitted, knowing how it can be prevented, being aware of testing and treatment options, and ensuring people living with HIV are treated with dignity and without stigma.

Health experts are calling for greater public awareness, regular HIV testing, improved access to treatment and stronger harm-reduction services.

They also stress the importance of ensuring that people living with HIV receive care and support and are not subjected to stigma or discrimination.

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Outside the classroom on an island of history

By Eseta Yavuvata

FOR generations, Nukulau Island, just off the coast from Suva, has carried a history that reflects some of the most significant chapters of Fiji's history.

Today, the island is known as a destination for day trips and picnics. Behind its peaceful surroundings lies a complex history involving colonialism, Cession, indentured labour and political upheaval.

It was this history that provided the setting for a recent educational visit by law students from The University of Fiji, led by Professor Aziz Mohammed, Dean of the Justice Devendra Pathik School of Law.

The visit was designed to take students beyond the traditional classroom and allow them to engage directly with a site deeply connected to Fiji's history and political development.

Professor Mohammed said the trip was intended to support the learning in the classroom.

"When you come out here, you get a feel of what has happened and get an understanding. They are privileged to all that has been presented by those that were here before them," he said.

Professor Mohammed underscored Nukulau's unique place in Fiji's history, describing it as both the birthplace of the republic and the setting for an event that led to Fiji's cession to Great Britain.

It was where US diplomat John Brown William's residence was destroyed by fire during July 4th celebrations in 1849.

Nukulau also served as a quarantine facility for indentured labourers arriving in the country.

And from here, after having been cleared, they moved on to labour in different parts of Fiji, he said.

Nukulau had a prominent role again after the insurrection of 2000, when the island was used as a prison for those who illegally took over parliament, among them the leader, George Speight.

For Professor Mohammed, the different chapters of Nukulau's history made it an appropriate setting for students to connect what they learn in the classroom with the events that shaped Fiji.

"So, what better than to bring students to the actual site where history has beckoned us and basically has translated into what we know."

The island therefore offers law students an opportunity to understand how historical events can influence the development of government, law and constitutional systems.

With such a layered history, Nukulau today presents a striking contrast to the roles it once had. The island now welcomes visitors for picnics, camping and short stays, particularly during weekends and public holidays.

Beyond its historical value, Professor Mohammed said the visit also served a practical purpose by allowing students to build relationships with one another outside the classroom.

He said such interaction was particularly important for law students, who would eventually work alongside one another in different areas of the legal profession…"Because in the law practice, they will be relating to each other, whether it be as legal companions working in the same law firms or in government departments. Or also relating to other individuals in the legal fraternity.

One of the student, Kimi Qaqanisereki, said the experience allowed students to go beyond what they had previously learned in the classroom.

"We have learnt a lot about this island. We have learnt from high schools, history and then came to the University of Fiji as a law student."

For the law students, experiencing the island first-hand provided an opportunity to look beyond the classroom and consider how Fiji's history, political development and legal systems are connected.





Professor Mohammed, second from left above, with students on Nukulau. Below, students compare notes on their field trip

Nukulau in his care



Meciusela Tavaga, right, from Nabuna, Koro Island, has been the resident caretaker of Nukulau since January 2023. His daily responsibilities include maintaining the grounds and keeping the main picnic and camping areas clean and tidy.

"I have to clean, cut the grass and pick up the coconut branches and leaves.."

Tavaga said visitors mainly arrive on weekends and public holidays, with some choosing to camp for several days while others visit only for the day. The island provides shelter for campers, and visitors can also bring their own tents.

Students show their creative work on film

CREATIVITY, storytelling and community voices took centre stage at the Suva Central Campus when second-year Journalism and Media Studies students premiered their documentary productions.

The screening featured six productions created by the students as part of as part of their major course assessment. It was the culmination of months of research, filming and editing before they presented their work to lecturers, university staff, industry stakeholders, family members and fellow students.

They were guided throughout by lecturers Josefa Mainavolau and Mr Hurstel Yee.

The documentaries included:

- *A Life of a Florist* by Milika Rabulu;
- *Petals of Perseverance* by Sereima Adi;
- *Our Modern Tongue* by Joseph Balolo;
- *Disconnect to Reconnect* by Eseta Yavuvata;
- *Life Made from Scratch* by Ramisese Saunivalu,

and

- *A Fading Craft* by Kelera Verenasau.

Mr Mainavolau said the project was designed to provide students with practical experience in visual storytelling while exploring issues of social, cultural and community significance.

He said documentary filmmaking was a vital part of journalism and media education because it combines research, interviewing, scriptwriting, camera work, editing and ethical reporting.

"We wanted students to develop strong research skills, critical thinking, teamwork, communication abilities and technical production skills. Most importantly, we wanted them to understand how powerful storytelling can be in raising awareness and inspiring social change," he said.

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem highlighted the importance of filmmaking skills in modern media education.

"All media students need to know how to make films. This course teaches them the techniques," Professor Shameem said.

She encouraged future students to embrace creativity and innovation in their storytelling.

University of Fiji Suva Central Campus Co-ordinator Ilana Burness said the screening allowed students to demonstrate their documentary-making abilities while engaging with media professionals and stakeholders.

Among the student filmmakers, Milika Rabulu's documentary *A Life of a Florist* explored the lives and struggles of flower vendors often overlooked in everyday society.

"People walk past florists in the market every day, but after doing this documentary, I discovered the stories and struggles behind the flower arrangements they create and sell," Rabulu said.

Sereima Adi's documentary *Petals of Perseverance* focused on a flower seller's determination to support her family.

Joseph Balolo's *Our Modern Tongue* highlighted the importance of preserving the iTaukei language and cultural identity amid social change.

Expansion planned as student numbers grow

By Peni Mitchell Shute

The University of Fiji plans to transform its Suva Central Campus into a major academic and public engagement hub as growing student enrolments put increasing pressure on facilities at the Samabula Campus.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem said the decision to secure additional space in Suva was driven by an urgent need to accommodate rising numbers of students, particularly in the nursing programme.

"The Samabula Campus is really bursting at its capacity," she said in an exclusive interview with UniFiji Watch, adding that overcrowding became especially critical during first-semester examinations, when limited space made it difficult for supervisors to move around and adequately monitor exams.

She said the University had known for more than a year that growing enrolments would create pressure not only on classrooms but also on laboratory facilities.

With no room to expand at Samabula and limited funding available for new construction, the University began searching for rental premises and identified a centrally located building in Suva as the ideal solution – Devo's on the Park, beside Ratu Sukuna Park.

"The location is right in the middle of the city and close to Parliament and the courts," she said.

Professor Shameem noted that the new campus provides students, particularly those studying journalism and media, with direct access to major news and governance institutions.

The University has moved its art gallery and retail shop to the campus, with plans to expand facilities to include seminar rooms and an information technology laboratory.

She said the long-term vision is for the Suva Central Campus to become a flagship centre for public relations, media, and community engagement.

Scan the QR code at right or click on the link below to see the full interview https://youtu.be/OVo2pZqFyD8

Film reveals horror of Tuvalu slave abduction

By Avitesh Ram

A DOCUMENTARY produced by UniFiji journalism students in collaboration with an island council in Tuvalu has thrown a spotlight on one of the darkest chapters in that nation's history.

The Stolen Laevans of Tuvalu: The Peruvian Slavery Nightmare premiered at the Fakaapo-Tuvalu Arts Festival in Funafuti, telling the story of about 80 per cent of Nukulaelae island being kidnapped and brutally forced into labouring in guano mines and on plantations in Peru.

Tuvalu's former finance minister and now UniFiji head of corporate services Seve Paeniu said the abduction involved four slave vessels. The wider Peruvian slave trade operated for a year to May 1863, targeting Polynesian island nations, with Tuvalu being the final stop in the "recruitment" mission in the Pacific.

The 40-minute documentary was produced through UniFiji's Journalism and Media Studies documentary course. Filming took place in Tuvalu and included interviews with people whose ancestors were kidnapped.

Archival photographs and information from published books were used in developing the film.

The production was undertaken in collaboration with the Kaupule of Nukulaelae, the island's council and administrative institution responsible for carrying out decisions made by its overning elders and serving as a contact point with the central government.

UniFiji Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem said the documentary reflected the University's commitment to preserving Pacific history and sharing important regional experiences with wider audiences.

She explained that two lecturers began investigating the story after learning about the slave trade in Tuvalu. With further research and assistance from students, the historical account was developed into a documentary for an international audience.



Seve Paeniu spoke of the shock and sorrow among members of the audience at the premier

Tuvalu Prime Minister Feleti Teo, the keynote speaker at the premier,described the film as a powerful reminder of the injustices suffered by the people of Nukulaelae.

He congratulated the island's people and UniFiji on bringing their history to a wider attention.

He also suggested that consideration should be given to reparations or compensation for the historical injustices.

"My government stands ready and willing to support the efforts to promote the key messages delivered by the film," he said.

Mr Paeniu said the premiere attracted a large audience, with many people expressing shock and sorrow as they learned more about what happened to their ancestors, with some "visibly shaken and with tears of heartbreak.".

He added that the response demonstrated the importance of documenting and preserving the experiences of the Stolen Laevans.

"This powerful film resonates really well with Tuvaluans, and our Laevan ancestors will never be forgotten," Mr Paeniu said.

The documentary also supports the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding between UniFiji and the Tuvalu government, which promotes cultural exchange and co-operation through educational, cultural and community activities.

Beyond recounting historical injustice, the film connects Tuvalu's past with contemporary challenges, including climate change, rising sea levels and the possible displacement of small-island communities.

Dr Shameem said that through the documentary, UniFiji and the Kaupule of Nukulaelae aim to preserve an important chapter of Tuvaluan and Pacific history, honour the resilience of the descendants of those taken, and encourage wider discussion about historical accountability and restorative justice.

World radio award for student

SECOND-YEAR Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) student Eseta Yavuvata has been recognised as a winner during World College Radio Day following her participation through the University's campus radio station, Vox Populi.

Yavuvata, *below*, said the recognition was both exciting and rewarding, describing the achievement as an acknowledgement of the effort she had put into participating in campus radio.



"It feels really exciting and rewarding to be recognised as a winner."

She said the experience had motivated her to continue developing her skills in both radio and journalism.

Yavuvata's interest in journalism and her desire to gain practical radio experience were among the key factors that motivated her to take part in the World College Radio Day activities.

She said she wanted to challenge herself, learn something new and become part of an international college radio event.



Journalism students pause for a picture on their visit to the studios of the FBC in Suva.Back row from left: Bula FM radio announcer Inise Nuku, Sereina Teilemb, Rishika Nair, Risha Maharaj, and Joseph Balolo; front, from left: Sereima Adi, Milika Rabulu and Kelera Verenasa

Real-life look at how the media works

By Sereima Adi

UNIVERSITY of Fiji journalism students stepped out of their classrooms to visit media offices to see and learn about how their future profession works.

Students saw how radio studios worked, how print journalists put their stories together, and how TV journalists wove a package together for news bulletins.

Working journalists walked the students through the daily news cycle, emphasising the verification processes, legal checks, and tight deadlines required to produce the news they delivered to a waiting audience through print, radio or television.

At the FBC, staff briefed the students on the technical coordination required to broadcast together across television networks and multiple vernacular radio stations.

Akuila Cama, deputy news manager, explained how breaking news items were sourced, verified, and structured under tight daily deadlines.

At the offices of the Fiji Times newspaper, they got a glimpe of daily operations – the news-gathering and editing required to produce the many and varied stories that qualified for inclusion in the next day's paper.

The students ended their day with visits to CFL, home to the major commercial radio stations, and to the news portal Fiji Village, at Communications Fiji Limited news, to see how news stories are prepared for its online site.

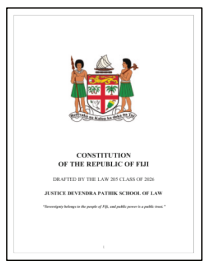
Students offer an alternative constitution for the nation



ONE of the most important attributes of the University of Fiji is "to be the critic and conscience of society". This attribute has appeared in all Strategic Plans of the University since our founding.

Over the years we have attempted to stay the course as critic and conscience which, at times, has been a very difficult exercise.

However, a recent event, led by students of the Law 205 Constitutional Law course, exemplified how being the critic and conscience of Fijian society could shift public opinion and make parliamentarians sit up and take note. The students, as part of their joint class assignment, drafted a Constitution for the Republic of Fiji just as the government was releasing its own Constitution Amendment Bill No 32 for public view prior to its parliamentary progress and national referendum.


CONSTITUTION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
DRAFTED BY THE LAW 205 CLASS OF 2026
JUSTICE DEVENDRA PATHIK SCHOOL OF LAW

The students appeared with me before the Special Constitution Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, on October 17, and offered their Constitution to the Committee as an alternative model. Their Constitution upholds equality, fairness and justice as well as public responsibility, calling governance a matter of "public trust". I have included the link to their Constitution at the end of this opinion piece.

It is obvious that both law students and journalism and media students of the University are clearly involved in nation-building with the core educational values of intellectual inquiry, research, ability to negotiate through differences in opinion, and the courage to take difficult issues head on at the forefront of their progress through study. This makes our students special and highly regarded by employers.

It also makes us proud that the holistic education that the University instills in our students allows them to stand up for the public good in whatever field they choose to follow.

Scan the QR code above, or visit *https://tinyurl.com/5esmm5ee* to read the full document prepared by the students

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YOUR SAY: How is the rising cost of living affecting your university expenses?



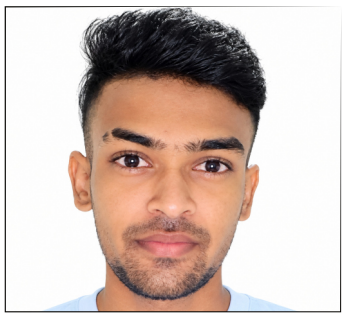
Rishika Nair – Year 1, journalism student
It means I have to manage my budget more carefully and reduce spending on non-essential items. Sometimes, it also makes it difficult to afford daily meals and transport while meeting my academic needs.



Sereina Teilemb – journalism student
As a sponsored student from Vanuatu, my tuition and some university expenses are supported by the Vanuatu Government Scholarship. But rising costs mean I have to manage my money carefully, reduce unnecessary spending, and bring food from home when possible to save for essential expenses.



Kelera Rokocula – Year 2, journalism student
"Rising living costs make my university expenses, such as rent, food, transport, and supplies, more expensive."



Avitesh Ram – JMS Administrative Assistant
It has made it more challenging to manage my university expenses. As a postgraduate student pursuing a Certificate in International Relations, I have to carefully manage costs. Balancing work and study has helped me manage these increasing costs, but budgeting remains important.



Shayal Devi – first-year law student
Rising transport, data, and book prices have made university life a daily juggling act where I constantly have to choose between printing notes/ textbooks, topping up my mobile data, or paying for fuel to get to classes.

Students take a break for a day of sporting challenges

By Catherine Yalewadua

STUDENTS from the University of Fiji's School of Medicine and Nursing (UPSM) came together at the Saweni Campus last month for a day of sports, fun and bonding.

The four main sports were soccer, touch rugby, netball and volleyball, but students also took part in mini-games such as sack races and musical chairs, creating a lively and enjoyable atmosphere.

Awards presented recognised recognising the best players from each sport, overall winners and participants who stood out as the best dressed.

UPSM vice president Prashaant Narayan said the main purpose of the Sports Day was to show that UPSM was not only focused on academic and medical studies.

It was also about having fun, staying active, and enjoying sports," Narayan said.

The event gave students a much-needed break from their busy academic routine and allowed them to relax and spend time with their friends.

The event also encouraged students to work together through team games and activities.

Narayan said participating students had the opportunity to communicate, support one another and cooperate, helping to build stronger friendships and bonds.



For Year 3 MBBS student Viliame Nasila, one of the highlights was spending time with fellow UPSM students and participating in the different activities.

"I enjoyed spending time with my fellow UPSM students, participating in the different sport activities and I also enjoyed the fun atmosphere."

"The best moment for me was just seeing everyone having fun and showing unity and pride for their classes," he said.

He also believed that events such as the sports day were important as they allowed students to take a break from studying and interact with students from other years.



Students from the School of Medicine and Nursing relax after a hard day of sport competition.
Above left: UPSM vice-preseident Prashaant Narayan

***UniFiji Watch** is planned and produced by students and staff of the Journalism and Media Studies department of the University of Fiji.*
It allows students to develop the research, writing and design skills they will need once they enter the world of work.

■ *Send any contributions to Avitesh Ram at aviteshr@unifiji.ac.fj*