

THURSDAY, 4TH DECEMBER, 2014

The Parliament resumed at 9.40 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All honourable Members were present, except the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs and Sugar and the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 3rd December, 2014, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Accuracy of Speeches

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, yesterday a point of order was raised about the accuracy of another Member's speech. At the time, I ruled that Members should be mindful that their comments made in Parliament, as it should be factual and not misleading.

I take this opportunity to remind honourable Members that it is not the Speaker's role to monitor the accuracy or otherwise of honourable Members' speeches in Parliament. If an honourable Member disagrees with what another honourable Member has said, they can put their side of the argument on record when it is their turn to speak.

Finally, may I remind honourable Members that it may be considered a contempt of this Parliament to deliberately mislead Parliament. Honourable Members should take care to ensure that they do not deliberately mislead the Chamber and make accusations at another honourable Member.

Speaker - Leave of Absence

I also advise honourable Members that I will not be attending tomorrow's sitting, as I will be attending a conference in Nadi. The Deputy Speaker will be chairing tomorrow's sitting in my place.

Acknowledgment of Visitors

At this juncture, I would like to welcome all visitors in the gallery. Thank you for coming to attend this morning's session.

QUESTION AND REPLIESUnemployment in Fiji
(Question No. 16/2014)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament, what steps are being planned by the Government to address and reduce unemployment in Fiji during its tenure in office?

HON. MAJ. GEN. (Ret'd) J.K. KONROTE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industry).- Madam Speaker, Sir, I rise to answer the question posed by the honourable Member about employment in our country.

Madam Speaker, Government's overall aim is to reduce the unemployment rate from its present 7 per cent to about 5 per cent by 2015 to 2016. And to achieve that, Government has, in 2009, established for the first time a National Employment Centre (NEC) where unemployed Fijians can register and the Ministry could co-ordinate and find jobs for them. Todate, we have about 39,000 Fijians registered with NEC. Of this number, we have managed to find employment to about 5,535 people, that is within the domestic formal sector from 2010 to 2014.

In July this year, Government had established for the first time, a Foreign Employment Service Department (FESD) within the Ministry to co-ordinate all our effort in finding employment for Fijians overseas. Todate, we managed to co-ordinate and facilitate the deployment of about 3,304 personnel who had gone overseas to work through the FESD.

At the moment, the Ministry is co-ordinating with the Governments of New Zealand and Australia to allow Fijians to work in those two countries under the Recognised Seasonal Workers' Scheme (RSWS) beginning early next year, where we hope to deploy about 30 people under a pilot scheme to New Zealand, following which we hope that by the end of next year, about 1,000 Fijians will find employment in Australia as well. Australia has indicated its willingness to assist in this regard, so again, the Ministry is co-ordinating the arrangements to finalise the deployment of our people to Australia as well.

In addition to that, in my contribution yesterday, I referred to the fact that Government plans to establish technical colleges right throughout Fiji. These technical colleges will address the shortage of semi-skilled personnel within Fiji, who are required in the labour market.

Also, for the first time, Government is establishing a Labour Market Information System within the Ministry to co-ordinate all those activities.

Madam Speaker, those are some of the major steps that have been taken by Government to address the unemployment problem in this country.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for what he has outlined this morning. In the tourism industry, with the seasonality and with only 700,000 visits they will get from the Government instead of a million, there is always a "seven months of plenty and five months of famine", meaning that a lot of our people are laid off for five months; what is the Government doing to make sure they employ those who are laid off, and thereby gain permanence and employment in the tourism industry?

HON. MAJ. GEN. (Ret'd) J.K. KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, that question honourable Member will obviously require research on my part. I ask that I come back to the Parliament with a response at a later date.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Supplementary question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I thank the honourable Minister for outlining the plan for unemployment. It is always sad to find teachers unemployed at the beginning of the year. Therefore, with that programme, can you assure the Parliament that all teachers coming out of institutions next year, that includes USP, University of Fiji, Corpus Christi, and Fulton will be employed?

HON. MAJ. GEN. (Ret'd) J.K. KONROTE.- Madam Speaker,

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker. Standing Order 44(8) states, and I quote:

“A question must not be asked for the purpose of obtaining an expression of opinion, the solution to an abstract case, or the answer to a hypothetical proposition.”

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not an opinion, it is a fact.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is obvious for you to rule on this. However, we believe, the supplementary question asked is whether if (a) happens, then whether if (b) will take place or not.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Will they be employed or not? That is all.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is my point of order. Madam Speaker, I think it is also very disrespectful that whilst I am addressing you

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! We have only just started this morning. Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Will they be employed or not?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... the honourable Member Nawaikula has a point to make. He may respectfully stand up after I have spoken and put his point across.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Please take note of what I mentioned in my communication, so that we can smoothly go through. However, in consideration of what the honourable Sayed-Khaiyum mentioned, would the honourable Minister for Employment like to respond to that question, either this time or later on?

HON. MAJ. GEN. (Ret'd) J.K. KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, I missed the question, would the honourable Member repeat it, please?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is in the *Hansard*.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- I thank the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations for his response. Just for a simple calculation, the honourable Minister mentioned that the Employment Centre had registered about 39,000 unemployed, and that they will be employing approximately 5,000 people every year. In the next four years they will have about 20,000 employees, which will leave us with 19,000 still unemployed. This is not including the ones that will be leaving school in the next four years. I just wonder, Madam Speaker, how these people will be employed?

HON. MAJ. GEN. (Ret'd) J.K. KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, Government is aware of the fact that about 12,000 to 15,000 school leavers will be coming out and looking for jobs at the end of each year. Government has started the process of looking for work for these people. It is not going to be easy finding jobs for everyone, but let me assure you that the Ministry is trying its best to address the issue. Hence, my comments in the beginning, the Government is looking at reducing the unemployment level from 7 per cent to about 5 per cent next year and 2016, and hopefully. With the opening of opportunities from Australia and New Zealand, that would somewhat alleviate the problems. But, by the end of the day, Government is committed to finding work for all Fijians. *Vinaka!*

Registration & Search Process - Registrar of Titles Office
(Question No. 17/2014)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the honourable Minister please inform the Members of this Parliament what plans the Government has to streamline the registration and search process at the Registrar of Titles Office, as the current time frame to register documents and conduct searches is too long?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Minister for Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice).- Madam Speaker, Sir, I rise to answer the question posed by the honourable Member, and I thank him for this question.

Madam Speaker, for those who may not be aware, the Registrar of Titles is responsible for the registration of land titles, deeds, charitable trusts, and religious bodies. The Registrar of Titles actually faces an enormous legacy issue. This Registrar of Titles Office, for example, used to be on the second floor of Suvavou House. There was so much weight on that floor that the floor was actually sinking. The Registrar of Titles was in fact not in compliance with the laws which stated that all original titles had to be stored in a fire-proof area. As one could imagine, if Suvavou House caught fire, we would have lost all the titles. We subsequently moved the Registrar of Titles Office from Suvavou House to the Ground Floor of Civic Tower, where it could be kept in a fire-proof area, and which we are continuing to build.

We also seconded a lawyer from the Solicitor-General's Office in Lautoka to be the Registrar of Titles to fast track a number of backlogs that existed in the Registrar of Titles Office. Indeed, at one point in time, we sought the assistance (as we did with the Ministry of Labour) of the RFMF where they helped to do the lag work. They have returned and a lot of the backlog had been cleared.

One will see, Madam Speaker, that in the 2015 Budget, a total of \$1 million has been allocated for the digitization of those records. What that will do, Madam Speaker, it will require going all the way back to the 1800s, some of those records go all the way back. Basically, digitise it, and then have those digitised records made accessible online to members of the public.

Madam Speaker, we are also opening a number of Births, Deaths and Marriages Registries throughout Fiji, that will be linked to the Registrar of Titles, in the sense that they both come under the Ministry of Justice. One office has already opened in Nausori, we will have the official opening of that very soon, one opening in Sigatoka, Nadi, and various other districts. So, people do not have to travel far, for example, people from Rakiraki or Tavua do not have to travel all the way to Lautoka to register their children, or if there is a death. Now, these BDM offices will open in those districts also, so it is just a bus ride away. One could also go to selected Post Offices, pay \$5 and get an extract of their Birth Certificate. Once those BDM offices opens, also the Titles Office will go together with it, it will make it a lot more accessible, in particular for those people who do not have access to computers.

Quite a lot of work has been done. We have recognised the fact that there was a legacy issue, we recognised that there were some backlogs, but we are addressing it and trying to leapfrog into ensuring that we are able to move through and sought these problems with digital solutions.

Name Change – Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
(Question No 18/2014)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the honourable Minister explain the specific reasons why the Ministry's name has changed from "Ministry of Women and Social Welfare" to the "Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation", when in the 2015 Estimates under budgetary programme 2, it still reads "Social Welfare" and not "Children and Poverty Alleviation"?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Madam Speaker, I rise to answer the question posed by the honourable Member as to the specific reasons why the Ministry's name changed when it still reads as "Social Welfare" and not 'Children and Poverty Alleviation' in the 2015 Budgetary Programme 2.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to make corrections to the question posed by the honourable member. The Ministry initially was called the "Ministry for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation" and not the "Ministry for Women and Social Welfare" as mentioned in the question. Please allow me to respond to why the name has been changed to Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Madam Speaker, this is a very simple question. If I may begin with a famous quote from *Shakespeare*, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet".

It is a simple question of name change, even if the name change had not been to children, Madam Speaker, the core function of the Ministry would still be ongoing.

The Ministry for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation, before being renamed, Madam Speaker, had core functions and the Vision was empowering women and the disadvantaged which included women, children, senior citizens, homeless and persons living with disabilities and of course the poorest.

Madam Speaker, the justification of the remaining of the Ministry to include the children's portfolio emanated from the Bainimarama Government being signatory to the United Nations

Conventions on the Rights of a Child, and as a nation we are duty-bound to fulfil our obligations under this Convention.

Madam Speaker, after the renaming of the Ministry, delightful acclamations from local institutions and international organisations, in particular UN agencies had been received by my Ministry. Of course, if I can note at this time, the enormity of the support that the Ministry has received from international partners in terms of provision for technical assistant and capacity building is commendable. Furthermore, it is only this Government that cares to have a Ministry for Children which aligned itself to our Constitution.

Madam Speaker, let me inform Parliament that in line with the commitment mentioned, as I speak within a few hours from now on, Fiji will witness the launching of the Fiji's First National Child Helpline Service, in partnership with Media Services Pacific, Vodafone Fiji Limited, Digicel and Telecom Fiji Limited.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, this alone signifies the importance of name change and this is just the beginning of many great initiatives that will be created by the Bainimarama Government to improve child care services.

Madam Speaker, on the second part of the question, in case of Social Protection Services which is now categorised under Poverty Alleviation Portfolio, it is a strategic move to boost technical capacity within the Ministry.

Head 24 Programme 1, Activity 2 – Poverty Monitoring Unit on page 192 of the 2015 Budget Estimates clearly reflects SEGS 1,2,3,4 and 5 and SEG 7 which will be included into the new portfolio.

Now answering the second part as to why in the 2015 Budget programme it still reads Social Welfare and not Children and Poverty Alleviation, there is no error in the Budget Estimates and it does not imply, if I may further add.

The Department of Social Welfare is stipulated in the following legislations; Juveniles Act, Adoption of Infant Act, Community Work Act, Probation Act and the Child Welfare Decree. It is only proper that the name “Social Welfare” be used in the 2015 Budget Estimates - pages 194 and 195 under Programme 20-4-2 until there are legislative changes. We will change it, thank you.

Madam Speaker, however closer understanding of the Budget Estimate will confirm that Child Services and Poverty Alleviations are actively funded under Head 24 - Programme 1, Activity 1 - page 193; Head 24 - Programme 1, Activity 2 - page 193, Head 24 - Programme 2 Activity 195; Head 24 - Programme 2 Activity 2 - page 195 and likewise in Head 24 - Programme 3 Activity 195.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; we do not often get to hear about the initiatives that Government takes on behalf of our children. So I would please ask the honourable Minister if she could further clarify if there are any other programmes which the Ministry is undertaking in relation to the wellbeing of our children.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I once again rise in response to the question as to programmes for children under the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Yes, the total budget for next year is \$2.5 million for Child Care Services. Currently the Ministry's programme

includes Child Protection Allowances and this is provided in support of children of single mothers, children of prisoners, those cared for by members of family or guardians and of course in all our residential homes, just to name a few. It also caters for children living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, currently this funding allows 2,242 children to benefit from this programme. However, we expect that number to increase as awareness spreads and more assistance is available.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank the honourable Minister for her response. I note that you said, "What is in a name?" A name is important, for example, you go to the bank and your bank card does not have the name "Rosy Akbar" - would they allow you the service? It is important that you synchronise the name of the Ministry.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Your supplementary question on the issue at hand?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You mentioned that there was no error. Is there really no error in the Budget Estimates in terms of the Ministry because I note on page 193 of Estimates, it states that in 2015, the Unit has been allocated a total of \$59,600 for its operations in 2015 and on the numerical side it states \$759,000.06" for the Poverty Monitoring Unit. Is that an error?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I am asking the Madam Minister.

MADAM SPEAKER.- You are dealing with the Budget so I would ask the honourable Minister for Finance to respond.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I go back again to the substantive question about the name change. The substantive question is not about the Estimates. Madam Speaker, the issue is about the name change. In respect of the figures itself, we are going into full Committee from Monday next week where we can go line by line. However, I go back again to the Standing Orders - this question is about name change.

The honourable Member has raised an issue about figures which we will be discussing all the way from Monday next week until Friday. We can pick up any errors, we can fix up any inaccuracies - that is the time for it, but Question time is regarding the name change.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will remind honourable Members that this week is really on the principles and merits of the Appropriations Bill and any details will be dealt with next week. Honourable Salote Radrodro, we will look at your question again next week.

HON. N. NAWAKULA.- A supplementary question: I thank you for the programmes for children. Could you please explain what programmes do you have for children with disabilities in Cakaudrove, not in the town but in rural areas, I mean the villages of Cakaudrove. I know of children who are disabled and suffering from down syndrome. What programmes do you have for them?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you honourable Member for your question. At the outset, let me just say that disability is a big issue for us in Fiji, and currently, the Ministry is looking at expanding its "reach out" to a lot of areas, including rural and maritime areas. On that note, the public consultations that we have been conducting around the country which will continue in the next few months, we are trying to collect and collaborate and find out ways, how better we can reach out to them in the near future. Of course, that is a priority for the Ministry.

High Turnover of Staff – Fiji Airways
(Question No. 19/2014)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister explain why is there a high turnover of expatriate CEOs and local senior executives of Fiji Airways in the last three years?

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 44(6). The question contains an inference on high turnover and it is also asking for an opinion which is an opinion in itself.

MADAM SPEAKER.- The point of order is noted.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, may I explain the question. It is not for an opinion, the high turnover is already a fact. It is not something that I am saying that has not happened for anyone to form an opinion on. It is a simple question, based on what has already happened. It is public knowledge.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, a point of order. The honourable Member asked reasons why a certain person left that particular post, that would be a fact. High turnover, is an opinion.

MADAM. SPEAKER.- My ruling is that, it is an opinion because that will involve statistics. We need to know whether you have the statistics so that we are able to address the issue directly.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Is that a ruling, Madam Speaker?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Yes, that is the ruling. You can bring up that question again next week when we get into the details of the Appropriation Budget. We will accommodate that in our next meeting.

Role and Functions of Qorvis Communications
(Question No. 20/2014)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister explain the role and function of Qorvis Communications to warrant the payment of taxpayers' money in 2013 and 2014, amounting to \$1,390,900 and \$1,000,000 respectively?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, Sir, I rise to reply to the question asked by the honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, in order to answer the question, I will need to give a bit of background of Qorvis Communications.

For the honourable Members information, it is a public relations company which is linked to the Paris-based *Publicis Groupe*, one of the world's communication companies (PR companies). The

Government hired them a few years ago, Madam Speaker, to essentially counteract much of the negative publicity that was being propagated about Fiji. In fact, those publicities, unfortunately, was based not on facts, but political inclinations proclivities, and indeed what we also found was that, many of the regional organisations, whether they were Radio New Zealand or *ABC Australia*, had only one side of the story to sell, but did not sell the other side of the story. So, we had, for example, Fiji being portrayed in 2011, 2012 and 2013 shots of soldiers on the streets with guns. This was not the accurate image. We obviously had a job to do in the sense of ensuring that there is economic growth and economic activity. We had trade unionists going on social media, getting signatures, showing images of soldiers on streets with their guns and telling tourists not to come to Fiji. That was the reality.

The other reality, Madam Speaker, was the fact that as a Government, we had to ensure that there was continuation of jobs, livelihoods and continuation of the courts. People were still stealing, raping, there was domestic violence, contracts need to be enforced, we needed to attract the best and the brightest, despite all the travel bans and negative publicity. This is not a phenomena but, in fact, a modern day practice where a lot of governments throughout the world hire public relations companies to carry out work for them. Indeed, whether it is Tourism Fiji or Fiji Visitors Bureau as it was known then, other aspects of Government have hired public relations companies before to market their country and portray the image. So we had, for example, Madam Speaker, through the recruitment of such an agency, articles appearing in *New York Times* and various other magazines on Fiji, of Fiji, about Fiji, about Fijians and the things were running well in the country. So, this is why Qorvis was hired to carry out this work.

Madam Speaker, Qorvis has also carried out a number of training programmes in Fiji with the Ministry of Information staff to be able to counteract many of the negative publicities that had been spread out. Comparatively, Madam Speaker, if you look at the figures that we paid out to them, and if you can take the worldwide scan, this is comparatively very, very low compared to the figures that many other countries pay.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; do we not have any local public relations company in Fiji that can do this work?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Not at all, the manner in which the connections that these companies have throughout the world to get an article published in various international publications, a company that exists in Suva, does not have that reach. This is why, Madam Speaker, we needed to have an international firm that has the connections and the ability to get that type of publicity that we need internationally.

Formalisation of Informal Settlements/Resettlement of Squatters
(Question No. 21/2014)

HON. CDR S.T. KOROILAVESAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the honourable Minister please inform the Parliament, what is the Government's plan for the formalisation and resettlement of our people in squatter and informal settlements?

HON. P. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, Government's plan to formalise and resettle our people is set out in a different Programme, and they are as follows:

- (a) There will be five new squatter settlement upgrading projects on the State land with the provision of 99 years residential lease. This subdivision will have all the basic amenities in terms of roads, water and electricity.
- (b) There will be four Newtown-wide informal settlement upgrading projects in the TLTB land with the provision of 99 years residential lease.
- (c) Five city-wide informal settlement projects in partnership with municipal councils.
- (d) Lagilagi Housing Project in partnership with the People's Community Network (PCN).

Madam Speaker, all these projects will be undertaken by the Ministry in partnership with stakeholders such as, municipal councils and PCN and as I have stated, but we are also working very closely with the TLTB and Ministry of Lands, to secure more land so that we can formalise and resettle our squatters.

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, may I ask a supplementary question to the honourable Minister. There is mention of squatters and informal settlements. The issue which I would like to put across is, there is no mention of the generosity of indigenous landowners. Squatters and informal settlements have been there for ages, through the generosity of indigenous landowners. Is there a thought or plan for the indigenous landowners who have, out of their *lolomas*, gave this land to be settled by the settlers?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, as everyone in this Chamber is aware, Government has allocated \$10 million for the upgrading and subdivision of the *iTaukei* land, but we have got plans. The squatter settlement that I have mentioned just now will be in partnership with the TLTB. There is an MOU in place and that is where the benefits will go to the landowners.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. My question is on the squatter resettlement. These squatter areas have been there for a long time and I just want to pose a few questions. Firstly, if you are going to resettle these people and develop the areas they are living in, are you going to provide alternative accommodation for the sitting tenants? Secondly, if the number of people are more than what will be accommodated in the area they are currently living in; and who will be accommodated, and where will you put the rest of the people?

HON. P. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, when he talks about resettle, there are two types of subdivisions that we will carry out. Firstly, the land that will be available to us from the Lands Department and the TLTB, that will be a new subdivision and at the moment, we have got so many squatter around the country, not from now but from what my good friend has said - from past governments as well.

What I am trying to say is that, we are here to resettle them so we will do it on the TLTB and the Lands Department land and we will make sure, as I have stated earlier that you will be fully serviced. On those areas where squatters are squatting illegally, we will make sure that we will do this subdivision in accordance to where their houses are. There will be no movement of houses so there will be no need to move people here and there. I can give you some examples. In Ba, in Clopcott

Street, we have carried out a subdivision. There is no movement of people and that is what our intention is and what we are going to do.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 68(1). In view of the amount of point of orders raised from the other side of the Chamber against us, I seek clarifications from your high office, if the amount of time taken in raising the point order whilst making speeches, are those time taken off, or counted towards our 20 minutes?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Yes, the Business Committee has agreed that we give 20 minutes to any questions put according to Standing Orders, and that still remains. However, during question time, we anticipate that questions will not take up to 20 minutes. I have been giving the floor to honourable Members that are putting supplementary questions to ask their questions and the answers as well, and they are also given 20 minutes, if they go beyond that, then I would have to stop them. However, they have managed to fully answer the questions in less than the time available to them.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, with due respect to your decision, all that I am trying to raise here is that, during those interjections, they are raising point of orders against us, under Standing Order as well, so we take our seats. There is an element of time that is being chewed up by observing all these protocol. That is why I am seeking your clarification on that.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, if I may be of some assistance to the Chair. In recollecting the deliberations of the Business Committee with regards to how much time each Member is allowed to make a contribution to the subject matter, I believe we agreed that it was going to be 20 minutes for each speaker and I think that is clearly the intent.

There will be issues, of course, with regard to point of orders and that is totally necessary as we might believe and you might know are necessary proceeding in the Parliament, but I think if there were interjections raised, that it is the responsibility of the secretariat and the Chair to keep the time to make sure that it is considered and it is not taken off the Member's time to speak. By the same token as well, from our side, we are making interjections on clear points of orders and not just orders that do not make any sense from the other side.

Madam Speaker, the point I am raising here in making those interjections by way of saying "point of orders" we take our seat. At that time we are on record, that is the 20 minutes that has been allocated to us. All that I am saying in clarification of the one from the Chair, not from the honourable Leader of the Government side, what is your ruling on that? Will you stop the time whilst we thrash out the point of order or are we going to take it off from the 20 minutes that has been allocated to us, whilst we on the floor. That is all Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you recording of time is taken by the Secretary General.

If we look at Standing Orders 74(3) it says and I quote:

“74 – (3) When a point of order has been stated, the member who raised it resumes his or her seat and no member, except with the Speaker's permission, may rise until the Speaker has decided the matter. The member who was addressing Parliament at the time the point of order was raised is entitled to continue with his or her speech, with no loss of allocated time, subject to any ruling made by the Speaker on the matter.”

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. - *Vinaka, vinaka!*

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE
2015 APPROPRIATION BILL, 2014**

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. - Madam Speaker, yesterday the honourable Dr. Biman Prasad gave us a lecture on the Budget speech, and he said even a “fishing trip” is related to the budget. On that note, Madam Speaker, I do not expect unnecessary points of order from the other side.

(Laughter)

However, thank you, Madam Speaker for this opportunity to contribute. This Budget session is significant to me, because it has come one full cycle from the last Budget session that I was involved in, as a Parliamentarian in 2006.

At around this time that year in the old Parliament building, the House had just passed the 2007 Budget. A few days later, the honourable Prime Minister here and his men took over, dismissed the House and the Government. They said at the time to oblige to do so, to clean up and remove corruption.

They have come one full cycle now to this Budget session, the juries I believe are still out, but they are with us here, a lot of ironies, one most prominent is that this Budget is presented by the very same people that dismissed it in the *coup* of 2006. The second irony is that, they assured us they will not participate in politics, but they are here now as members of the governing party.

History wish to doubt us all, and is looking more like its many years away, maybe after we are all dead and gone. Be that as it may, and nonetheless, the honourable Minister for Finance has presented the Government’s Budget. It is called “Turning Promises into Deeds”. To me, Madam Speaker, the proper title should read: “Rewarding Fiji for supporters and making the rich, richer”

Because it is all very well to be talking about the \$3.25 million by that is the budgeted figure, but what matters is who gets to receive a share of that money and service and capital payments and who benefits. In my view, those who will share the monetary benefit of this \$3.25 million are the handpicked company supporters and voters of FijiFirst. The burden of payment however, will fall upon the poor to pay from indirect taxes, and increase service charges.

Madam Speaker, let me first say a word or two on our economic survival from 2006 before I come back to the beneficiaries of this Budget. Fiji has managed to sustain itself economically despite the *coup* of 2006. It could have been much, much worse. For the Government, the honourable Minister for Finance is claiming unprecedented prove, due to sound economic policies. He said, and I quote:

“This unprecedented growth trend, and particularly the strength of this growth are clear evidence that our economic policies and investments, Government is undertaking are doing what we intend them to do, and that is the right economic cost for Fiji”

I disagree entirely with this claim. If anything, the one and only reason why Fiji has sustained itself economically in the last eight years, and because the public and especially, the native population of this country has exercised restrained is by being continuously suppressed of their rights and interest by this Government.

In the past eight years, as part of its policy of mainstreaming native Fijians to remove the group rights and cultural identity, the Government passed a total of 17 Decrees. These are designed, amongst

other things, to take away their name, terminate their cultural institutions like the Great Council of Chiefs, to take away control and management of their land, to take away their cultural rights of asserting areas, divide up the management of native land on the separate institutions, like for example, we have not only one Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) but a number.

That is one that looks after mahogany leases and another the Land Bank. For the native landowners, actually there are three institutions now that are looking after the native land, but you all and your chiefs agreed to only one.

Also, to remove the trans provisions of their right of prior consent from the Constitution. What I am referring to here is the entrenched rights that were there before, that allows or caveats a Government to always obtain the prior consent of the chiefs and native owners before it changes any policy or laws relating to native land. But despite these laws that suppress their rights, despite especially the Human Rights Committee ruling that these are acts of discrimination, the native population has remained calm in their anger and exercised restraint.

There was no public uprising, no public protest, no subversive actions to destroy infrastructure and property. In my view, this exercise of calm restraint more than the economic principles is the reason for our economic survival since 2006.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – These are good policies.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. – No.

(Laughter)

Imagine for one moment, if there was public uprising, what would have happened to the tourist industry? They would have all gone away, and where would we be? Some people have criticised us for this culture of silence. But one elderly lady I met on the coast of Natewa Bay advised me and she said, and I quote:

“There are people who have faith in our God Jesus, we leave it to him to decide the time and manner to do justice”

OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. - Madam Speaker, let me now comment on the beneficiaries of this Budget. On face value, the Budget does not tell you that it is there to benefit the hand-picked company supporters and voters of FijiFirst Party. But if you ask some questions, and do some research, you will see that this is happening. Take regional development for example. You cannot deny the statement by the Government to the media that the people of Vanua Levu will either be denied totally, or they will be the last in priority, because they supported the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) and not FijiFirst.

An individual that came to my office said to me, that upon asking for assistance from the Prime Minister's Office, he was told to go to Niko Nawaikula, because he is the Prime Minister for Cakaudrove since they voted for him and not FijiFirst.

(Laughter)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – Congratulation!

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. - In Labasa and Savusavu, Madam Speaker, similar messages from the Government has filtered down to the regional heads in Government offices . The new election result procedure, which tells you at an instant who supports which party from each village is not helpful. In the North, Government officers attend to villages or levies with copies of the Election results, the Government officials use the result to either deny assistance or decide on priority.

The point I am making is that whenever possible, and will help of election result, this Government will not treat individuals as equals and request on merit, and the direct assistance to their supporters exclusively as a matter of priority.

HON. P. KUMAR. – Don't tell lies!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. – Yes.

(Chorus of Interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER. – Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- On companies, they have preferential treatment as supporters of FijiFirst, take Fiji Dairy, for example. This company has been assisted by Government, under a special Decree namely Decree No. 62 of 2010 to acquire the Rewa Dairy Factory. In this year's Budget, a sum of \$3.6 million has been allocated to provide 250 millilitres of milk per day to all Year One students. The question I ask is, who will ultimately benefit from this budgetary provisions? It is questionable that Year One students need milk more than pre-schools, so that is questionable. Do they need it, or the pre-school?

Now, the poor dairy farmers who are farming and the suppliers will not benefit from this allocation because they already cannot meet the supply quotas. Milk will have to be imported and the only major importer, whether 32 per cent duty concession and primary beneficiary of this allocation, is Fiji Dairy Limited. It was a company that was assisted by the Government under Decree No. 62 of 2010, to acquire all interests in Fiji in the Rewa Dairy factory.

The honourable Minister for Commerce yesterday begged on about the sale and how it helped pay off a \$17 million debt. The question is, why did the Government not think out the solution of providing milk in 2010, as a way to assist Rewa Dairy Limited and opted instead on the formation of a company that is no longer owned by the poor farmers? This company that owns the factory is no longer owned by the farmers.

The answer certainly is that at the time, we owned 20 per cent and with 50 per cent, you can control the company and you can say it is your own but for 20 per cent you are just a bystander. At the time, unlike now, there was no vested interest. From documents that are available to me (and I stand to be corrected from the honourable Minister of Finance when he makes his reply), there was no change in the purchase price of \$27 million. There was no exchange of money. The new company merely acquired the factory, together with the liability of \$17 million debt, while the other \$10 million (this is where the 20 per cent comes in) was capitalised in the 20 per cent share in the new company. So there was no exchange of money.

This budgetary allocation of \$2.5 million is already looking to go into this new company to pay off the debt. In the process, this is very important and this will also affect some Members here if farmers are denied ownership. They have lost ownership and the Year One students are used merely as an excuse or pawns.

Madam Speaker, another example is the Kanvan Papers. This company is a known financial supporter of FijiFirst. How will it get its reward from this Budget, you may ask. The answer is simple. This year, behind the rhetoric of freebies, the Government is increasing from five per cent to 32 per cent tax on exercise books. This is Kanvan line of business; come tender board, so what, but you can be rest assured that Kanvan will make its killing in this area for reward.

There are many more examples. The sad thing is, that the poor will carry the burden of all these payouts and freebies, but not the company and it is not the rich people. The poor are going to bear the burden. The proof of this is, when you look at the budgeted tax, not only for next year but consistently over the years, what you will find is an increase in indirect taxes.

Next year for example, the direct tax is only budgeted at \$582,780,00, compared to VAT which is budgeted at \$892,680.80. That shows clearly that the burden on all those freebies and textbooks fall right back on the backs of the poor people as and when they pay VAT at the shops. This is the reason why when you go to any shop and if you spend \$100, it is not enough. You will be surprised of the things that are there in your trolley.

Madam Speaker, I would like to comment on the breach of Financial Regulation and procedures arising from these types of activities. This is the first Budget by this Government to come under scrutiny by this Parliament in a proper democratic process, but already it can be seen from the above examples a system of rewarding sympathisers can lead to financial procedures and even corruption. It does not help neither the Government that has been the final arbiter in all dealings in a dictatorship, nor does it help if does opt not to release audited public accounts in the last eight years.

Madam Speaker, as the piles of Reports by the Auditor-General show that this can lead to breach of procedure and even corruption, take for example, the Auditor's Report of 2013, this is enough to show that this breach of procedures tantamount to corruption. I have a copy here and page 46, Volume IV of the Auditor-General's Report of 2013 shows a possible agricultural scam in the region of \$19 million over a number of years.

Madam Speaker, on page 36, you will see a list of all instances, noted by the Auditor on mismanagement and everything. In some cases, tractors and other equipment are sold and these are, like the last scam, by the farmers and when time comes for monitoring, there is no equipment in the farms. These are all noted here and the honourable Minister for Agriculture will take note of that.

HON. CDR. S. KOROILAVESAU.- Can the Public Accounts Committee look at that?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, there is a point of order raised because you are taking the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, what I am raising here is for the Public Accounts Committee to see that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. CDR. S. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on the issue that the Public Accounts Committee has been designated to look into this account. The honourable Member should concentrate on the Budget.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Which order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am citing exactly from a page in the Public Accounts book and I am noting to this Parliament, as well as to the honourable Minister responsible, to take note of that when he makes his submission and even here, I am allowed to even accuse anyone, using my parliamentary privilege.

The other example that we can see is from Volume I of 2013. That shows a total FNPF debt of \$7 billion. The problem with FNPF is that the Public Accounts Committee will want to look into that. There is a Decree to remove from the board the owners of this Fund so that owners of FNPF individuals are no longer in the board and they are replaced totally by the Government alone. That is a possible case of conflict of interest in giving the loan to your own self (I think). There are many other examples, we can take all the examples like that of Captain Esala Teleni and Captain Neumi

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, may I remind you not to refer to a person directly.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I know that is my privilege.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- The honourable Member should withdraw from referring to persons, it is not allowed.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I believe I have the privilege to name anyone here and that is the whole reason for a democratic system.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, Standing Order 62 does not allow the honourable Member to make those statements.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Honourable Member, please take note of the Standing Order raised and do not refer to anyone directly. Secondly, the Public Accounts Report has not been debated at this time and if you can concentrate your presentation on your responses to the Budget.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will just refer to 2008 Reports. There is a shortfall outstanding or unaccountable from the Police and that was during the time when we had a big problem with Police. They were sponsoring a church and it was funny....

HON. J. USAMATE.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker. Madam, you just ruled that the honourable Member needs to focus on the Budget but he continues to take us backward for something that has happened in the past. In my opinion, the purpose of this discussion is to comment on the Budget, that is moving forward. We already have the Public Accounts Committee that will deal with those particular issues. In this case, we need to look at the Budget that is talking about how are we going to move forward. Our discussions will be, whether the suggestions on how we move forward are right or wrong rather than looking backward. We should be looking forward on whether this Budget is the right one for Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, may I make a ruling here. As I have already said, this session is to look at the principles and merits of the Appropriation Bill. Let us concentrate on those issues, please.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, as I said yesterday, I think there is a misconception amongst some Government Members about the point of order in relation to what Members of Parliament can say in response to a budget. A budget, as I said before, is not just about the allocations, expenditure and income. In this debate, under the Parliamentary Privileges, budget can be related to any issue. If it relates to a past event that a Member of Parliament wants to use to make a point, Madam Speaker, that Member should be allowed to do so.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I was just going to ask the honourable Member, what is the point of order, but I see that he has taken his seat.

(Laughter)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members with all the issues that have been raised, I now ask the honourable Nawaikula to continue.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I would end by saying that the Police crusade make us a laughing stock. You call a Police Station and they will say "Praise the Lord"- what for? And you have policemen in uniform doing a chorus. Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will continue.

Madam Speaker, I will now like to comment on the absence in this Budget for any consideration for rural native cultural life style of the *vanua*. By native Fijians here, I mean, native Fijians living in a subsistence or semi-subsistence like in their villages (not you and me) on the customary authority and traditions. I certainly do not mean native Fijians like us here who live in the towns, but there is no doubt, we all feel very deeply for those who live in villages who we consider as the root and the essence of our cultural identity.

This identity, and by that I mean a cultural village life in a village setting, living subsistent and in harmony with nature and the environment is disappearing very, very fast. And yet, we all know that overseas and elsewhere, people look to that kind of life as paradise but the irony is that, all of us who were brought up in villages know that our education and training is designed to take us away from that rural life setting.

However, the United Nations now under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) is saying that living in a village under customs and tradition and in harmony with nature and its environment is a right that must be protected, if not, it will be lost forever. It has so much to teach the world on how to live a sustainable life in harmony with nature and its environment. The goal therefore, is not to destroy it, rather to protect it because it is a right and the challenge is how to maintain that while making Members participate fully in the local economy.

How does the Appropriation Bill address the rights of native Fijians in rural settings? Looking at the budget, it is apparent that the needs are addressed under separate agencies, including social welfare, poverty elimination and rural development. There is a specific allocation there for the Ministry of Fijian Affairs but its role, from my assessment of the budget, appear to be as an agent of Government to administer to native Fijians on Government programmes.

Madam Speaker, there is a need, and I urge the Government to take a very serious look at native Fijians in the rural setting and to bring about the administration in line with UNDRP, the consequence of not doing so is to totally lose the identity, and by that I mean the custom, language, traditional knowledge and the cultural setup of the people and its culture.

Finally, I wish to add my voice on the request made by the honourable Dr. Prasad and the honourable Kepa and others before me, to plead to the Government to please release the pension owing to the former Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase. I understand, Madam Speaker, this sum has been consistently budgeted over a number of years, except that the honourable Prime Minister has not found the time to approve its release. I beg the honourable Prime Minister to please release his rightful entitlement to him as a citizen that is equal amongst others under our laws.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for your information we have now changed the warning bell. It is now being sounded two minutes before the end of your presentation and not one minute as had been the practice.

HON. S. PATEL.- Madam Speaker, honourable Acting Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members. Please allow to first of all commend the honourable Minister of Finance for the 2015 Budget that he delivered on Friday, 21st November, 2014 and which is geared towards stimulating a sound and sustainable national development in Fiji with the theme, "Turning Promises into Deeds". This being the first National Budget by the democratically elected FijiFirst Government which focusses on all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, like all parliaments around the world, when a budget is announced, the Government will support it and the Opposition will make criticisms, but ultimately we are here for the whole of Fiji.

The 2015 Budget is indeed the best budget and it incorporates the Bainimarama-Government's views to make swift and bold decisions to achieve progress quickly for all Fijians.

As a businessman, I can see positive results as this budget is going to bring to life all Fijians. After meeting a lot of local and foreign investors, I get the vibes that investor confidence is at its peak. The Budget expenditure of \$3.3 billion is by far the highest ever in Fiji's history, and it shows Government's commitment that this budget would add to the progressive economic development to our nation. Government's policies to continue with low tax incentives for both personal and corporate will ensure not only workers, but business owners to continue to money.

Madam Speaker, what has not been highlighted by a lot of Members is that with a low-interest figure, now families can afford homes, buy new cars and properties. That shows that confidence in the economy is back. The construction of new buildings and resorts continue, which will create more jobs due to such policies. This is also relating to local businesses to acquire previously owned overseas businesses in Fiji.

Health: The most noticeable change to improve health care service is the allocation of \$4.8 million to recruit nurses and doctors. This is a significant progress towards the goal of having a thousand nurses by 2017. A ratio of 40 nurses to 10,000 population has improved to the current ratio of 26 to 10,000 nurses. A further \$4 million for the construction of an 80-bed hospital in Nausori, along with \$5.5 million to construct a 10-bed birthing unit at Makoi Health Centre, \$4.2 million to upgrade Rotuma Hospital and \$2.2 million to upgrade Keiyasi Health Centre. The new provision of \$8 million for the free medical programme is a major Government initiative for people earning less

than \$20,000. We can see that the Government is taking all necessary actions to provide services to its people.

With an increased budget of \$4.4 million in the Ministry of Women, Poverty Alleviation, this will allow reforms to take place in social welfare programmes which includes the poverty benefit scheme, child protection allowance, food voucher programme, social pension scheme and bus fare subsidy. This will ensure that aid flows to those who most need it and this is to the people of Fiji

Madam Speaker, \$100,000 is provided for Fire Victims Relies Assistance grant. The poverty benefit scheme is being allocated \$22 million and the child protection allowance has a budget of \$2 million. The Government continues with its initiative to help pregnant women in rural areas, through food vouchers by allocating \$1 million. Furthermore, an additional 12 staff would be recruited to improve field service.

In order to light up the whole of Fiji, the Government has allocated \$19.5 million in the 2015 Budget to the rural electrification project. This is the start of Government's initiative to make sure that all Fijians get electricity.

The Police Force will get better pay to deliver a better service to all Fijians in the quest to reduce the crime rate, even further, compared to 2014.

For the first time, District Advisory Councillors will be given an allowance to provide better services in their area. The Budget is not merely a financial document, but it encapsulates the aspirations of ordinary Fijians which has been delivered through the 2015 Budget.

Madam Speaker, I am supportive of the of the 2015 Budget because of the priority areas due to the fact that these are areas of need, which has been neglected by previous governments. The Bainimarama Government is formed on the principle of delivering the service with diligence and this is not just a lip-seal service, but a real action. The Budget will instil great confidence in each Fijian to reach to their greatest potential.

Madam Speaker, it is also worth mentioning that the Fiji Government is the first in installing unity amongst all races by declaring a common identity for all, every individual can now be proudly call themselves "Fijians".

In Fiji, many Governments has come and gone, but it is the Bainimarama-Government that has addressed the plight of the poor and disadvantaged by reaching out and responding with urgency. Once again, the 2015 Budget demonstrates the relentless effort by this Government to open doors of opportunities, and to improve the lives of the ordinary Fijians. The leadership qualities of the Bainimarama-Government, its swift and bold response to address the very needs of every Fijian, with compassion and sheer dedication, is unique and unmatched. This was clear through the victorious win scooped by Fiji First in the 2014 General Elections. The Bainimarama-Government will walk the talk, and the Budget is diverse to transform the life of every Fijian through, "Turning Promises Into Deeds." This 2015 Budget is focussed on our future, investing in the lives of Fiji's women, children, men, senior citizens and people with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, and honourable Members of Parliament, I thank you all for your indulgence, and I am pleased to endorse my support for the 2015 Budget.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, honourable Acting Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute on the motion before this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, development is improving the lives of ordinary Fijians in many good ways. The work started eight years back by our Prime Minister, the honourable Voreqe Bainimarama is very much visible, and I, together with the people of Fiji know what more will be delivered in the years to come.

Madam Speaker, getting tap water to all homes, electricity, good roads, new homes, government services near to them was just one's dream before the Bainimarama-Government came in. But now, the people of Fiji know that there is a Government that cares for all Fijians, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds, social standing and geographical locations, gender, religion and ethnic background. That is why, Madam Speaker, people voted for Fiji First. That is why we have a FijiFirst-led Government, an inclusive Government. A Government that cares for the future of Fiji. A Government that is investing in the younger and future generations.

Madam Speaker, that is why I support the 2015 Budget. I commend the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Finance for a Budget that continues with the agenda of the Bainimarama-Government, a Budget that is inclusive, smart and future-based.

Madam Speaker, it is also for the first time in our country's history that a political party, after winning the General Elections is "Turning Promises Into Deeds". Fiji First, our Party, and truly the peoples-party proved to the nation, region and to the world that they mean what they say.

Madam Speaker, and honourable Members of Parliament, imagine what it means to the people who, for the first time, will start to receive tap water. We, in the urban areas take tap water for granted while some need it for survival. They use rivers, wells and streams just to get water, but now they will enjoy the convenience of clean, quality and constant tap water in their homes.

I have seen prayer celebration and emotional appreciation for having water readily available at home for their families for the first time. This commodity is taken for granted here in this side of the island where we enjoy abundance of rain water daily, and one should take a ride down to the Western side of Viti Levu and will realise the scarcity of water in settlements and farms.

Madam Speaker, I must thank Government for providing funds for cane access roads. It is a big relief to the farmers and rural residents. For years, people have been thinking that the sugar industry will be written-off, but the Bainimarama-Government has done a lot to improve the sugar sector. The future is bright, not bleak. The canefarmers and all those associated with the industry are very happy. Off course, academics and other critics who are not sugarcane farmers or those who use sugar really do not know what they are talking about. I know the fact, and the actual cane farmers know the facts. They have seen the differences and I know how much farmers appreciate and recognise the efforts of Fiji First-led Government.

Madam Speaker, I must also commend Government for resolving the land lease issue. This has brought confidence to the farmers and will continue to increase the sugar production, and production output in the other agriculture areas.

The Committee on Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) has received an increased allocation in the 2015 Budget, and this is a sign that more land leases are being renewed. This is good for the landowners, the farmers and the country as a whole.

Madam Speaker, I am not a professor from a University, but I know that there are many professionals who know and can tell the landowners exactly what the outcome of these policies mean, and will mean. These professors of farmers, landowners, small shopkeepers, canecutters, fishermen, villagers, ordinary workers can tell you exactly what the economic needs, and they are very happy with this Budget, and the performance of the Government, that is why they have voted for FijiFirst.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. V. PILLAY.- That is why Fiji Labour Party did not win a seat. That is also why National Federation Party (NFP) barely made it five per cent, probably the lowest percentage of votes NFP has ever received. The Leader of NFP should check these figures.

Madam Speaker, Fijians will also benefit with the free water assistance from households whose incomes are less than \$30,000. Ordinary Fijians also benefit with Government plans provide full medicines for those earning below \$20,000.

Madam Speaker, our Class One children will receive free meal for the first time. Madam Speaker, I am an ordinary man with nearly a quarter of century of fulltime community work. I could not believe that the honourable Leader of the NFP was making fun of this free-meal provision by saying that it should also have been given to students in other classes and kindergartens. However, on the other hand, the honourable Member was saying that Government is spending too much. Even I understand that all Governments have limited resources, so obviously we all should be happy and grateful that there is a Government that is making a start. It is better to start than simply just talk about it. It is better to grow our economy than to criticise. It is better to work together for and with all Fijians than to create fragmentation.

Madam Speaker, free education and free bus fare is already a big relief for parents. We have seen more students wanting to attend school and parents are keen to send their children to school. Free education and with the allocation of funds as announced will specially cater for rural and maritime schools.

Increase in electricity subsidy is welcomed. What is also welcomed is the big rural electrification programme. This will be very good for all rural and maritime people.

Madam Speaker, I must commend the Government for recognising the hard work done by our advisory councillors, *mata ni tikina* and *turaga ni koro*. They play a very important role on the ground, they are an important link to the community and vice-versa for Government.

Madam Speaker, for those who may not know, as it seems that most honourable members in this Chamber are heaven-based. Rural advisory councillors have to cover large areas of a district. The *turaga ni koro* are confined to villages, at the same time the *mata ni tikina* liase with the *turaga ni koro* for the *tikina*. Even though the rural advisory councillors have to cover vast areas and with dispersed homes, they only get an allowance if they attend a yearly meeting. For the first time in our history advisory councillors in Fiji will receive \$100 per month. The *turaga ni koro* will get an increase in allowance and so will the *mata ni tikina*.

I note, Madam Speaker, that the previous government did not even do this, but now questions these allowances. I also welcome the move by the honourable Minister for Rural and Provincial Development in one thing to have more cooperation and coordination between the councillors, *mata ni tikina* and *turaga ni koro* so there is a combined effort to development and address the problems of different parts of Fiji in one community. This is truly nation building and true national development. I ask the advisory councillors, *turaga ni koro* and *mata ni tikina* to work closely with Government to better the lives of our people.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to make long speech, as a true rural person, I know most honourable Members here, while they claim to be from a rural or maritime area do not actually live there on a full time basis. I do, Madam Speaker. I know many cannot get away from the comfort of urban living and the bright lights at night. I am a simple person, I do not have the tertiary qualification as some in this honourable Chamber, but the quality of debate, ideas and the lack of long term vision seen from the Opposition is very saddening. They are out of touch with good realities and the ordinary people. I hope that by next year the quality of contribution improves. Most of them can learn a lot from ordinary rural people from Ba and Government members.

Madam Speaker, with these observations, I fully support the 2015 Budget presented by the honourable Attorney General and Minister for Finance. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I rise today to give my official response as Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to the 2015 Budget Address.

Madam Speaker, it is widely acknowledged that investing in infrastructure constitutes one of the main mechanisms to increase income, increase employment, increase productive and consequently the competitiveness of an economy.

In national planning, infrastructure development often is the platform devised and set to charter the platform for long term sustainable growth. It is upon this premise that associated budgets often reflect the government's commitment towards the growth of a nation.

Smart governments ensure that in the implementation of infrastructure development, costs are contained as much as possible domestically, and this means the utilisation of local businesses for construction and procurement of services with the exception, of course, where local expertise or products are not available domestically. This will allow for minimal wastage to be effected and maximum benefit and profits is retained within the national economy.

Madam Speaker, there has been a marked increase in the 2015 Budget for Infrastructure Services which according to the Budget Estimates includes the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Water Authority of Fiji, Fiji Roads Authority and Peacekeeping Missions.

Collectively, the total budget expenditure for the sector in 2015 will be a massive \$1.078 billion. This represents 32 per cent of the total Government budget. The figures, Madam Speaker, are astounding - \$1.087 billion to be allocated under only one Minister - \$1 billion dollars!

Madam Speaker, in 2014, the total budget for the Infrastructure Sector was \$722 million. This was 25 per cent of the total budget of Government.

In 2013, the same sector, spent \$489.3 million which was 23 per cent of the total actual expenditure. The trend indicates the continuous increase in budget allocation by the Government

towards infrastructure sector from 23 per cent in 2013 to 32 per cent in 2015 and this raises a lot of questions.

Madam Speaker, before I comment further on the Budget, interestingly the staff summary for the Infrastructure budget is not listed for the first time unlike previous years. This raises further questions as to how the application of the Budget will be effected.

Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) – The FRA is an entity that came into being in 2012. This will be the first time they will come under scrutiny in our Parliament.

In 2012, the Department of National Roads came under reform. Some of the reasons include;

- (a) Insufficient funds
- (b) Big backlogs of projects
- (c) Inefficient procedures, for example, all workmen operating from depot and travelling long distances.

Following recommendations of the Asian Development Bank, the FRA was established. Their role was to oversight maintenance work which would be outsourced under contractual arrangements to ensure efficiency. Along with the establishment of FRA came a consultant, MWH to be the change agent to oversight the reform. MWH later appointed themselves as Engineering Services Consultants.

HON. MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I suggest to Government to review the role of the change agents which is now a conflict of interest and in that respect, could the honourable Minister inform this Parliament as to how many local staff are part of the engineering management team?

Madam Speaker, given the background of FRA, it is now clear and the subsequent appointment of MWH, I will now like to enlighten this august Parliament on the Budget allocation directed to FRA. For the year 2015, FRA is allocated \$653 million, inclusive of \$15 million grant from China. This is 38 per cent increase in their budget allocation from 2004 of \$474 million. According to the budget, 2015 is year three of a 7 to 10-year programme to arrest deterioration and restore the roads, bridges and jetties to an acceptable standard that will provide a safe and cost-effective land transport network well into the future.

The budget has also highlighted that FRA will continue its programme of building new rural roads and upgrading existing ones. The budget further states that all major works will be carried out on 13 rural roads across Fiji. Can the honourable Minister inform this august Parliament, since FRA started its operation, how many new roads has it planned and constructed and how much was the cost involved? It would also be helpful if we can be informed what the average cost of a kilometre of road they construct.

The budget has also stated a new programme that will see at least 30 villages benefit from new street lights next year. Can the honourable Minister also explain what will be the average cost of installation of these new street lights?

The budget has also highlighted that the flagship project for next year will be a replacement of the Denarau Bridge. The question is, how much will this cost the taxpayers?

Madam Speaker, while we are still on roads, I note that there is a separate allocation for rural infrastructure that is available under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management for non-cane access roads. This is to the tune of \$1.5 million. Likewise, I also note there is a further allocation of \$2.5 million for the upgrading of cane access roads, which includes drainage, works, installation of culverts and construction of crossings. The question is, why this infrastructure works cannot be undertaken by FRA?

Water Authority of Fiji (WAF): Madam Speaker, we know that the WAF has been allocated a grant of \$239.2 million in 2015. This is an increase of \$99.6 million for this year's allocation of \$139.5 million. The budget highlighted that the increase is to fund the operation cost of WAF which includes a new subsidy for low-income earners that was part of Government's Elections promise. Interestingly in 2013, WAF under Government's allowance wrote off an estimated \$14 million through a waiver which was to cater for 25,529 customers - 22,345 for domestic account customers or ordinary households and 950 for schools and religious organisations.

According to public statement issued by WAF in the *The Fiji Times* of 18th September, 2012, WAF attributes leakages as a main reason why some customers had incurred high bills and fell behind in their payments. However, it is not clear whether the leakages were from the Government pipelines or that of the customers. Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, the whole purpose of the WAF Reform was to make it a commercially focussed entity that is efficient, profitable and that services our people with one of the most basic needs. In 2013, the actual revenue collected by the Authority was \$23.4 million and is expected to collect a revenue of \$28 million in 2015, against the highlighted budget of \$239.2 million, out of which \$176 million is for capital expenditure.

Madam Speaker, these raises a lot of questions on the purpose of the Government reforms and the logic for Government to be providing all these subsidies and freebies.

Madam Speaker, I also note that under Head 50, \$2.9 million has been allocated under Miscellaneous Services and this includes the feasibility of Sovi Basin Dam, located in the province of Naitasiri of whom one of our honourable members on the other side of this Chamber is also one of its resource owners.

I am hopeful, Madam Speaker, that given the huge returns on investment that is usually derived for the use of such resources which usually runs into thousands and millions of dollars annually, perhaps Government should properly review the fair return to the resource owners during the economic use of their resources.

Madam Speaker, the allocation given for the Department of Energy is \$29 million against \$31 million in 2014. In addition to this, an allocation of \$5.5 million has been allocated for electricity subsidies for low income families under the 85 kilowatts usage. This was part of the Government's Elections promises, and is an increase from the \$3.5 million allocated in 2014, to cater for the low income families already under the 75 kilowatts subsidies.

Based on the current consumption trends, FEA has estimated a further 9,244 customers who will benefit from this initiative of Government. This is in addition to the 52,772 who are already enjoying the 75 kilowatts subsidy.

Madam Speaker, can the honourable Minister explain how Government is determining the subsidy allocation? Do customers have to indicate that they are from low income families or how do they do that?

Government Shipping Services (GSS): Madam Speaker, on the GSS from the overall budget provision given of \$17.8 million, a capital purchase allocation of \$3.3 million has been allocated, and \$3.1 million of that, is to meet the completion of a new landing craft, apparently under construction and to be completed in 2015. For the three years to 2015, a total of \$17.38 million has been allocated to GSS for capital purchases.

Would the honourable Minister advice this Parliament what was utilised on this humongous capital expenditure and what are the status of the capital assets to-date?

Land Transport Authority (LTA): Madam Speaker, LTA has been allocated a \$14.9 million grant for 2015 against budgeted fees and fines revenue of \$21 million and road user levy of \$14 million.

The road user levy collected over the three year period to 2015 is approximately over \$30 million and I would like to question where and how is this money utilised.

Under Head 50 - Miscellaneous Services, and under the allocation of \$2.9 million, the LTA is also expected to conduct a review of the current policies, guidelines and regulations in relation to the taxi and carrier industry.

The honourable Minister should assure this Parliament that proper public tender process will be undertaken in appointing the consultant to conduct this review.

Peacekeeping Missions: Just before I conclude, I will state that the Budget for 2015 is ambitious, questionable and strange in some ways. I will go to the last part of what I just said.

It is strange that whilst I was looking for the infrastructure sector in the Budget Estimates, I had found much to my curiosity an allocation for peacekeeping missions allocated as Head 49 under sub-heading Infrastructure.

The Peacekeeping Missions allocation is for \$72.6 million in 2015, compared to \$71.2 million in 2014. Further, out of curiosity, I looked for the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and saw that it came under General Administration under Head 19, There I see the RFMF has been allocated \$103.3 million for 2015. This is an increase of \$9.4 million from 2014 - an allocation of \$93.9 million. Further checks determine this budget allocation does not include the \$72.6 million for the peacekeeping missions for 2015. Madam Speaker, I am refiguring the RFMF budget to \$175 million therefore, in general, comparing the two separate budget allocations under Head 19 of the RFMF at \$103.3 million and the Peacekeeping Missions allocation under Head 49 at \$72 million, one can be forgiven to think that a Peacekeeping Mission budget is almost enough to fund a separate small army. This kind of practice can be termed "deception."

On that note, I hope this allocation will be corrected and put in its right place as I am most fearful if I were to oversight anything to do with the RFMF, Madam Speaker, as I might certainly get myself in all sorts of trouble. Madam Speaker, the role of every Government is to provide infrastructure developments. How effective and efficient it does so, has to be done taking into consideration that the people of this nation will have to foot the bill for the development.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. – Minimal assistance comes from donors in the form of grants. Therefore, the accountability of this budget has to be scrutinised and monitored consistently. Those in

positions of authority, who will have the responsibility of oversight over this Budget, will have to be meticulous in their role.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER. – Hear, hear!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. – As such, in my scrutiny of the budget for the Infrastructure Sector, I forewarn that the devil is usually in the detail.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. – Therefore, the many questions that I have raised rather than answered in this Budget ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER. – Confirm the devil!

(Laughter)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. – ... I find it impossible to support this Budget. On that note, Madam Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence and leave us with the Word of God taken from the Book of *Luke*, Chapter 14 verse 28, and it reads:

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?”

(Laughter)

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you very much. Let us rebuke the devil.

(Laughter)

Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for refreshments. I invite all the honoured visitors in the gallery to come and partake the refreshments out there. There is plenty of milk for everyone. We will resume the session at 12 p.m. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 12.00 p.m.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO. – Madam Speaker, I rise and take this opportunity, first of all to thank our Lord Jesus Christ for the opportunity, and also to respond to the Budget Address, as given by the honourable Minister of Finance on Friday, 21st of November, 2014.

Madam Speaker, budget is a politics of numbers. The 2015 Budget mirrors the Government's mandate, the Government's priority and the Government's focus. As reflected in the allocation of funds under each Ministry Head, no matter what the Government says, a true measure of their words is in the allocation of funds under each Ministry.

Madam Speaker at this point, I take this opportunity to acknowledge and express a big *vinaka vakalevu* to the honourable Minister of Finance and all the officials in ministries and departments who have worked hard to put this Budget Estimates together.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – *Vinaka!*

HON. S.V. RADRODRO. – On the same note, I take the opportunity to thank all the civil servants (Established and Unestablished) in standing true to their calling in delivering service to the members of the public in Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – *Vinaka!*

HON. S.V. RADRODRO. – Madam Speaker, the Government has labelled this Budget as “pro-people”, but let me ask the question, is it pro-poor? And to be able to enhance that question, let me just give you a simple analogy. If a single mother, a market vendor from Naitasiri, comes to the market and sells her products, and after which she walks across to the New World Supermarket to buy a bar of soap for \$4. All of us here can go to the New World Supermarket, we also buy for \$4, and a grandmother who comes all the way from Moce Island, accompanying her husband who has come to be hospitalised, also goes there to buy a bar of soap for \$4. Regardless of what level of society we are in, we still buy the same bar of soap for \$4. So I ask the question, is this Budget pro-poor?

Madam Speaker, Government has also labelled this Budget as “Turning Promises into Deeds” and to be able to do this, they have a massive revenue projection of \$3.1 billion. To fund the total expenditure of \$3.3 billion and with a deficit of \$203.9 million, and who raises the revenue? Yes, it is us, the people of Fiji, the tax payers, rich or poor, employed or unemployed, we all pay taxes to the Government. We must remember, the common tax that we all pay is VAT, and that does not differentiate between the poor or the rich.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER. – *Vinaka, vinaka!*

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the corporate and personal tax collected by Government from those earning \$15,000 and above was \$397.2 million in 2006 and is projected to be \$582.5 million in 2015; an increase of 47 per cent over the last nine years. Keeping in mind the 47 per cent is what the big corporation or businesses contribute in taxes and we all pay employee income tax.

Madam Speaker, let us look at what ordinary people pay in terms of VAT for all goods and services that we purchase. Collected in 2006 was \$298.1 million and 2015, a projection of \$605.4 million which is an increase of \$307.3 million or 110 per cent increase. So, while the freebies might

cost Government about \$60 million, the same Government takes from all of us \$784 million in VAT and in duty. So we ask, who is really paying for the freebies?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We pay?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- *Io o keda ga na lewe ni vanua. Oya na ka meda vakasamataka tiko.*

MADAM SPEAKER.- A point of order. Can you restrict your presentation to English.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Furthermore, Madam Speaker, what will the revenue from the sales of Government assets like FEA, Airports Fiji Limited, Fiji Ports be used for? Will it fund this 2015 Budget or will it pay off loans and debts? But as such, Madam Speaker, “Turning Promises into Deeds” is sounding more like ‘Turning Promises into Debts’.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker. - I shadow the Public Service Commission, the Ministry of Women and Children and Poverty Alleviation and if I have time, I may add some comments on infrastructure and education.

Madam Speaker, the Public Service Commission has a Budget of \$43.1 million but we must note that in this Budget Estimates, which normally contains the list of all employees in the Civil Service, whether they are established or unestablished, are usually contained in this Estimate. But for 2015, I note that they are not there. So, I ask the question, Madam Speaker, how can the Government accurately allocate funds for salaries and wages, if they do not know the number of employees?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- They have a bogus number.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- On the same note, I request that the listing be made available to us before further debates on the Estimates is undertaken.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Minister of Finance also outlined his dream in transforming the Civil Service, as captured in his Budget Address and I quote:

“A centre piece of this Budget is the commencement of a major overhaul of the government principal instrument of service delivery, the civil service”.

Additionally, the honourable Minister highlighted the following as part of the reforms programme which includes up-skilling of civil servants, improving systems and processes with the leverage of latest technology, reward an incentive-based performance review system so that the civil service becomes competitive with the private sector by offering not only attractive jobs, but also long-term job security.

In this regards, Madam Speaker, I applaud these reform initiatives on behalf of all the civil servants. But unfortunately ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Oh!!!!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... I do not know how this reform will be conducted because I note with great concern that there is no specific allocation for the Civil Service reforms under the PSC

Estimates. There is only \$500,000 under Head 50 SEG. 1 with the accompanying narration that says and I quote: “that development assistance would be provided by the World Bank.

Madam Speaker, if you take time and look at this book, which says “Turning promises into Deeds” and I read about the World Bank to reform the civil service, and I quote from the last sentence; “An allocation of \$500,000 has been set aside in the 2015 Budget for this exercise” and it is titled *World Bank Review of the Civil Service*. There is no commitment in here by the World Bank in cash, grant, or in kind to reaffirm to us that the reform will be undertaken by the World Bank.

(Chorus of interjections)

So, indeed turning promises into deeds, I am worried on behalf of the civil servants, because I do not know whether these promises turn into deeds or not.

Madam Speaker, how can the Civil Service Reform be undertaken with only \$500,000? These are questions that the honourable Minister for Finance needs to answer. What is the total budget needed for the reform and where is the money coming from? How much is the world bank providing, because there is no commitment, as I have already said, in the Estimates.

Madam Speaker, if there is to be any real commitment in the Civil Service Reform that has been announced by the honourable Minister for Finance, we hope to see a reform plan, which should have specific clear measurable targets with corresponding budgetary allocations and time lines in place. If it is available, may I ask the honourable Minister for a copy.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, although the honourable Minister of Finance has said in his Budget Address about Civil Service Reforms. It is rather misleading, because he has not provided the necessary resources. For example, under Head 50, an allocation of \$28.6 million has been earmarked for the Police on the Job Evaluation Exercise. That is what we want to see for the Civil Service Reform, but that is not appearing on the Budget Estimates. We want to see what are these specific amounts and activities that will be undertaken under the Civil Service Reform programme.

Madam Speaker, the Civil Service Reform, as alluded to by the honourable Minister portrays a clear picture that this Budget “Turning Promises into Deeds” only looks good on words but lacks the number or estimates to be able to support it.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- So we ask, where is the money? But having said that, if indeed the honourable Minister is serious and sincere about the reforms, then I suggest that he makes a start by taking appropriate actions on the following:

HON. OPPOSITON MEMBER.- He should be reformed.

(Laughter)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- For example, firstly, the review on the compulsory retirement age from 55 years to 60 years, bearing in mind the selective application of the 55 years retirement when right now, some of those who are well beyond 60 years are still in the service.

Madam Speaker, I firmly believe that civil servants or other employees for that matter are too young to retire at 55 years. It is simply a waste of investment on human resource development. On a lighter note, we are all doing quite well in this august Parliament along those lines.

Secondly, can the honourable Minister address the de-militarisation of the Civil Service and at the same time may I ask the honourable Minister of Finance if the Civil Service Reform also includes all those ministries and departments and agencies as listed in the Estimates?

Madam Speaker, may I now look at the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. In the Book of *Proverbs*, Chapter 14 verse 1, and I quote:

“A wise woman builds her home, but a foolish woman tears it down with her own hands.”

I always believe that the status of any family, village, country, for that matter, is the reflection of the spirituality of its women.

The total budget of the Ministry is \$44.8 million. The Department of Women has been allocated \$3.3 million, which is only seven per cent of that budget allocation, Children – 18 per cent and Poverty Alleviation – 75 per cent.

Madam Speaker, at the beginning of my contribution I had mentioned that the actual budgetary allocation reflects the Government’s focus or mandate. So with that kind of allocation, it speaks volumes on how this Government views the women of Fiji who make up almost 50 per cent of the total population and yet are only given \$3.3 million for their development and empowerment in Fiji, that is, our grandmothers, mothers, wives and daughters of Fiji. Is this the value we place on them as reflected in the National Budget?

Madam Speaker, I hear from the other side that this budget is the mother of all budgets. Why mother?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- We have more mothers on our side, you only have one.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- So, in the very same budget, an allocation of only \$3.3 million is for all mothers and women in Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- So it’s a father’s budget.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you are affecting the time given to the honourable Member on the floor with the interjections, because that affects her time.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- So how can one call it the mother of all budgets and not have the mind and heart to allocate an appropriate amount like \$16 million towards the well-being of our mothers and the future mothers of Fiji. In this regard, Madam Speaker, I can hear the Government’s ring tone of “Turning Promises into Deeds” sounding very hollow. I take this opportunity to urge the Government to seriously review those ministries with huge allocations, like Health, Education, Infrastructure and Transport, and make virements to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

From a socio-economic perspective, let us briefly compare the Ministry's budget to that of the disciplined forces – the Military and the Police. The Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has a budget \$44.8 million and of that, only \$3.3 million is for the women. The Military has a \$103.3 million plus another \$52.8 million under peacekeeping (separate budgetary Heads), giving them a total of \$156.1 million and the Police - \$120.5 million.

Madam Speaker, analysing this type of budgetary distribution, we can confidently say that indeed the Government's mandate and priority gravitates towards Military as compared to the Police and Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. In this regard we ask, how does the Government see it fit to allocate \$156.1 million? Is Fiji under threat, and if so, from what, from where, from who and why? Why that big amount of budget to the Military? I urge this Government, Madam Speaker, who prides itself in being the first, to prove itself once again and be the first to transfer at least \$16 million from the Military budget to boost the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for the development and empowerment of women, elimination of violence against women and children and poverty alleviation.

Infrastructure: Let me highlight that Water Authority of Fiji has \$239.2 million and Fiji Roads Authority has \$638 million. This is a huge allocation for any one year, particular so when it is held under requisition or release of funds under "R" with the Ministry of Finance which is a time consuming process. In such cases, it questions the transparency, accountability and good governance as a whole. Sometimes we can say that funds tied up under requisition is an unseen Government strategy of intentionally delaying the release of funds, so as to cover up problematic cash flow and makes the budget look good.

Madam Speaker, since time is catching up, let me just wrap up with poverty alleviation and ask the Government, is this budget really going to help the poor, the voiceless and the vulnerable or is it going to benefit the

HON. MEMBERS.- Rich.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I did not say that, they said it.

(Laughter)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... rich, the business people through Government initiatives.

Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji know and understand that without our taxes, there is no development. So I am urging this Government to reduce the common tax of VAT to at least 12 per cent so that the poor can really benefit from this budget.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, even though I had expressed reservations on the budget, I do not support it, but nevertheless I take this opportunity to wish the Government well in their pursuit of this 2015 Budget and in implementing the 2015 Budget for the betterment of all the people in Fiji.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the Budget that has been prepared to run the affairs of the Government for the year 2015 to meet the aspirations of the people of Fiji. In so doing, I support this Budget that has been delivered by the honourable Minister of Finance. There could not have been a better budget than what the honourable Minister of Finance has provided, given our limitations and I join my fellow colleagues and the silent ones from the Opposition bench in congratulating him.

Madam Speaker, I will provide a brief background to what a budget is, for the benefit of honourable Members on the other side, as they have been misguided by some former politicians who ran a workshop for them a week ago. Had they asked for our help, I would have done that for free without prejudice. I will then examine the resource mix and see how it is placed from what it should be, with respect to international benchmarks and then I will speak on the education sector which is my forte.

The Opposition has thrown in a number of terminologies to describe this budget. Some say boring, deceptive and unrealistic; is that so? No, Madam Speaker, that is not true.

Madam Speaker, that was why the Manifesto was laid and its activities and projects represent the aspirations of the rank and file of this country, and the Budget is the manifestation of that aspiration.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- *Vinaka.*

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Unlike some of the previous parties, we are honest, determined and committed to delivering on to the aspirations of the people.

Madam Speaker, the national Budget is seen as the single most important financial report in Government's financial management system. There is no other financial document which is more important than this. It is the instrument which allows the Government, elected by the people of this country, to deliver on to their aspirations.

Madam Speaker, we cannot let the Budget be hogged by donors or the Opposition Members. The need to understand that we cannot cripple ourselves by letting them capture the Budget. This Budget, against the backdrop of our pro-poor government growth policies stance, provides an estimate of expenditure that the Government plans to make over a period of 12 months.

Madam Speaker, as I have alluded to earlier on, these expenditure items have been carefully thought out on the Supplementary documents and those documents outline the ways in which the total amount of expenditure is raised.

Madam Speaker, whilst the Budget lays down the rules for allocation of funds for the running of the country, they lay down the foundation for economic and social progress in the longer run as well. So, it is not only an accounting and economic document, but also political document. So when honourable Members rise to commend the Budget, my humble plea to them is to understand the issues of:

- (a) That we have been elected based on a set of activities that we outline prior to the Election;
- (b) They have had their share, Madam Speaker, public then decided to vote for our Plan which we will define there in this country's development. This Plan is here in this Budget document.
- (c) That the financial resources are not unlimited;
- (d) That we want to talk about today and draw plans about the future. We do not want to continue to dwell on yesterday.

Those in the Opposition benches continue to talk about yesterday, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker, when analysing the Budget, one has to look at the level of expenditure, expenditure mix, expenditure allocation, revenue level, deficit, et cetera. I am afraid our learned Members in the Opposition bench fall short of doing justice to these kind of analysis, which they should have done to enlighten their side. Some honourable Member on the other side have argued that this Budget is too large and quoted the figure \$3.3 billion as too high. May I ask the honourable Member, “what then should have been the expenditure?” About \$2 million, \$2.5 billion, \$2.8 billion?

Madam Speaker, let me provide the answer to that. The size of the Government expenditure depends on the size of the economy, because our ability to spend is dependent on our ability to raise revenue. Internationally, for a country like Fiji, if our expenditure is below 40 per cent of GDP, we are doing well.

Madam Speaker, in early 2000, our Government expenditure to GDP ratios was over 31 per cent. We were denying the country and the future generation critical infrastructure investments. The present Government has identified these critical investments, and it is because of this, we have our expenditure to GDP ratio currently standing at 38 per cent, well before the 40 per cent benchmark.

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that the last proportion of capital investment are one-off expenditure. Hence, there can be significant decline in our expenditure to GDP ratio in future, once we take off this one-off expenditure items. Then we tend to further gain with the increase in the GDP capital infrastructure investments.

Madam, Speaker, some honourable Members on the other side also argued on the size of deficit. They argued that the deficit of GDP ratio is much higher than 2.5 per cent because we have included projected sales revenue. Why not? This is our asset, and we wish to liquidate part of this asset to give us leverage to broaden our investment, so that the private sector can grow. We want a private sector-led growth, Madam Speaker. That is part of our Government’s strategic planning.

Madam Speaker, some honourable Members on the Government side argued that we are privatising our critical infrastructure and this could have harmful effects on our people, while rising fees, charges out of this infrastructure such as Ports Authority, AFL and FEA.

Madam Speaker, as the honourable Minister of Finance and the Ministry of Industry and Trade have pointed out, these entities are not privatised. Please, for goodness sake it is not privatisation, but their shares are divested. Government will still be in control of majority shares, the charges out of AFL, FEA, and Ports Authority are regulated by the Commerce Commission and thus, cannot be raised at the whims and fancies of any party.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, my advice to those Members on the other side is not to shy away from deficits. The excess of expenditure is not bad, as long as it is used to raise the productive capacity of the economy. Madam Speaker, what do you do with that deficit? What do you do with the excess expenditure? That is important.

To this effect, world operating expenditure is paid out of vire of operating revenue. The excess or remaining operating revenue, along with borrowings, are used to pay for capital expenditure. Unless we make these kinds of critical investment now, we cannot achieve the long term economic growth target that we want to. Madam Speaker, what is the target?

Honourable Opposition Members should realise that for a developing country like Fiji, our potential is about six to seven per cent in real terms. That is what we need to get and we cannot get it through by shying away from making important critical capital investment. This leads me then to the issue of debt level.

Madam Speaker, our forecasted debt to GDP ratio of 49 per cent is slightly higher than the international benchmark but well below levels that would cause us to have sleepless nights. However, this has surprised those on the Opposition benches and they, therefore, started to look for something else. They have now added contingent liability to find comfort. Contingent liability is not Government debt, so no amount of witch-hunting will give them comfort, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, my last general comment on the Budget is that, it contains the best possible expenditure mix to deal with critical issues confronting the people with regard to the services they would want to obtain from different Ministries. Money does not grow on trees to fulfil all their wishes.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Wishes and wants are unlimited, but resources are not. That is where optimal resource allocation skills come into play, and our Minister of Finance has done an excellent work in this. Every Ministry wants more allocation.

Madam Speaker, allow me to add on to what my Assistant Minister and fellow Members on this side have alluded to with regard to the Ministry of Education which we are in charge of. As I have said earlier on, I am honoured to be given the noble task of furthering Government's vision of providing affordable quality education to our people, young and old.

Madam Speaker, we have done well so far and a special thanks to my predecessor for his long service to Fiji's Education Sector and my Ministry wishes him well. However, that is not enough, Madam Speaker, we need to lift our game plan. There are problems with our quality of graduates that come out of the universities as highlighted by industry stakeholders. There are issues with the quality of students coming out of primary and secondary schools. Madam Speaker, the average mark in the main core subjects in Year 12 and Year 13 Exams have been falling over the last decade, with the mean marks in some subjects as low as 25. For most of the subjects, it is below 50.

Madam Speaker, to arrest these problems, we have embarked on a number of reforms, to name a few – improving student: teacher ratio, continue with free education, extending free education to pre-schools, introduction of specialised teachers to teach students in Year One and Two, reclaim our teachers to engage in teaching, improving the quality of primary and secondary curriculum, introducing exams, providing a powerful technical education. Madam Speaker, I will talk on some of those in detail, some of them have been covered by my other colleagues on this side of the Chamber.

Madam Speaker, on improving teacher: student ratio, my colleagues on this side of the Chamber have alluded to this. However, what I wish to add here is that, this allocation demonstrates

Government's concern about the attention our students should get in the classroom, as well as the workload of teachers. We are mindful of the large workload of our teachers.

Madam Speaker, the increased allocation to the tune of \$14 million is not a small amount in relation to the competing demands that we have from various Ministries. It will not only lessen our teachers' load, but provide more attention to the students. We are also looking at providing employment to 348 new graduates.

Madam Speaker, I want to dwell a bit of time on continuing with the free education that we are providing. A number of questions have been raised from the other side, even some honourable Members were asking, is it really free education? Today, I want to settle this issue once and for all.

Madam Speaker, I have already explained earlier in my maiden speech that the main stumbling block for students' accessing primary, high school and university, road bus fares and tuition fee. For primary and secondary school children, they no more need to pay for bus fare or tuition fees. In 2013, a total of 203,157 students studied at our primary and secondary schools. In 2014, this number increased to 205,026 students, an increase by 1,869 students.

Madam Speaker, these 205,026 students and their parents are no longer hassled by school tuition and building fees. They are no longer sent back home. Government in 2014 provided an additional \$33.9 million to be allocated to primary schools, an increase from the previous amount of \$7.6 million. \$31.7 million for secondary schools, an increase from the previous amount of only \$11.4 million.

Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, let me read an article from the *Fiji Sun* dated 6th September, 2013, with the title "Sabha may send students home". With your permission, Madam Speaker, may I quote:

"There is a possibility that students in Arya Pratindhi Sabha of Fiji School may be sent home for overdue school fees"

The Sabha president, Kamlesh Arya said and I quote:

"We will be doing a review of school fees next week and if children are found still owing fees, chances are that they will be sent home."

Madam Speaker, let me also read an article in the *Fiji Times* dated 14th June 2007 titled "200 Students Sent Home". I hope they get comfort from this. May I quote, Madam Speaker:

"About 200 students of a secondary school were sent home for the non-payment of \$30 term fees levied by the school. It was revealed yesterday Assemblies of God High School sent the students who defaulted on term two fees homes on Tuesday".

Madam Speaker, let me tell the Opposition bench and the people of this country, never ever again will this happen under the Bainimarama Government.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, in 2013 a total of 5,434 students started at various tertiary institutions in Fiji. In Fiji, under the *iTaukei* Affairs Scholarship, Multi-Ethic and PSC Scholarship, for a total expenditure of only \$41 million.

Madam Speaker, in 2014, the Government sets aside \$83.5 million and a total of 12,943 students studied at various tertiary institutions in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, this represents an increase of 7,509 students more. Madam Speaker, this is a substantial increase in student numbers under our Free Education Policy for tertiary institutions.

Madam Speaker, we are also allocating more per capita grant to smaller remote maritime schools for next year. For example, a primary school with a roll of 50 students would have received \$12,500 will now be eligible to get a targeted another \$7000 next year. Madam Speaker, this shows our real and genuine commitment to the disadvantaged remote schools. We do not just talk, we follow the real action.

Madam Speaker, my fellow colleague, the honourable Dr. Lal spoke about pre-school education and I will skip that and talk about improving the quality of primary and secondary curriculum.

Madam Speaker, curriculum and exams are at the core of quality education. We need to consolidate and strengthen this section. We must have experts in every subject area. Madam Speaker, let me admit that currently we do not have this in most of the subject areas. In the absence of this, we have been utilising teachers to prepare exam papers. Of course, Madam Speaker, you must have heard about leakage of exam papers. When we allow our teachers who are teaching to prepare exam papers that will happen. Why it happened is because we did not have subject matter expertise within our Ministry.

We will move away from this, Madam Speaker, from 2015. The honourable Minister of Finance has provided funding to hire people with Master's Degree in respective subject areas and they will lead the teams in the revision of curriculum, as well as preparing external exams.

Madam Speaker, let me assure this Chamber that in the not too distant future, we will in the Ministry have PhD holders in every subject area so that they can talk to the university professors and say what they want included in the curriculum.

Madam Speaker, you must have heard about our reforms in reclaiming teachers to ensure that they engage in core business. Let me talk briefly on that.

Madam Speaker, our teachers who were loaded with admin work (and this took them away from quality teaching), we are now working with principals and head teachers to ensure that all admin work are taken away from them and they devote full time on teaching, and teaching only. All principals and head teachers will be pulled away from teaching and they will undertake all admin work with the use of an admin officer.

Madam Speaker, I will briefly talk about reintroduction of exams, as there have been some doubts about it. Madam Speaker, we announced the reform and the introduction of external prepared exam. Madam Speaker, following the removal of exams, we witnessed several problems:

- (a) Students were not able to independently assess their learning outcome, thus doing poorly when they are bumped up into exams in Year 12.
- (b) Teachers were not covering full syllabus, as they set the exam papers themselves. As such, when students move to the next level they get lost, because teachers in the next level have difficulties teaching these students since they have not fully grasped the previous material.

Madam Speaker, we intend to prepare exam papers at our revamped Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) Exams Unit for Year 6–13 and this will ensure teachers cover full syllabus. Exam papers are of equal standard and all schools are of the same standard and there will no longer be any reason for parents and students to choose schools. Madam Speaker, the budgetary allocation allows us to do that.

Madam Speaker, you have heard about the establishment of Technical Education. It is a revolution. We have been pushing students to Year 12 and 13. They get out to universities and they flopped. What we have allowed for these students after Year 12 is to decide whether they want to pursue their university dreams to technical education, which they can still do, and become an engineer through technical education and through technical colleges.

Madam Speaker, you may have noted that within a month in office, we have commissioned an independent team of experts to examine the scaling of marks that we were undertaking. We intend to take up a final report to Cabinet and will make an announcement of how we intend to do that, to remove the inefficiencies that were there and were perpetuating because of the scaling of marks and not allowing us to deal with the core business.

Madam Speaker, now I will talk about the Education Commission. I note that the honourable Leader of Opposition and leader of the National Federation Party (NFP) argued for an Education Commission. It is good that they agreed with my suggestion for an Education Commission.

Madam Speaker, my assurance to them is that, we will have it when the time is right. Let us now get the fundamentals right. Madam Speaker, we do not need an Education Commission to come and tell us that we need to revise our curriculum. We do not need an Education Commission to come and tell us that we need to increase our teacher-student ratio. Madam Speaker, I cannot get it from them. We do not need an Education Commission to come and tell us that our Classes One and Two students need to be attended to by specially trained teachers. Madam Speaker, we do not need the Education Commission to tell us that we need to establish magic park for students who want to pursue a technical education. Madam Speaker, we do not need an Education Commission to come and tell us to deal with the fundamental flaws, it will be a waste. However, we are talking to a few development partners and once we get them on board, we will then establish a commission to examine the broader crucial issues, the credibility and the link between the overall vision and the education system that we want to have.

Madam Speaker, I join my fellow colleagues in supporting the Budget document that has been delivered by the honourable Minister of Finance and I do hope that Members from the other side will join the silent colleagues and support this Budget.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to support and speak on the Budget Address that was presented by the honourable Minister of Finance, the honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

Madam Speaker, firstly, let me congratulate the honourable Minister of Finance and his staff for putting together an inclusive and broad-based budget, in order to accommodate the wide spectrum need of the nation. In so doing, the honourable Minister of Finance has also kept alive what the FijiFirst Party's Manifesto had promised the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Minister of Finance has also fulfilled Chapter 7, Section 144 (1) of the 2013 Constitution under the sub-heading of "Annual Budget."

Madam Speaker, secondly, let me thank the honourable Members of this august Chamber for their thoughtful comments and suggestions made over the past few days, the focus of which was mainly on issues pertaining to the directions that we are taking towards achieving quality growth and a more inclusive society. However, there have been many specifics raised as well. Many comments were constructive while others seemed to take us back in time with questionable motives.

Madam Speaker, it is time for a change and there is a paradigm shift taking place with the old school of thoughts phasing out, and the new school of thoughts coming in to being, to suit the time, which we are all aware of. Changes are inevitable. We must all accept the reality of change.

Madam Speaker, I will now focus specifically on a few areas of the Budget:

- (a) General comment on the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health Budget allocation;
- (b) Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport;
- (c) Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation; and
- (d) Women.

Madam Speaker, in my view, education is the heartbeat of any nation, including ours, as well as its bedrock, grounded firmly in our love for God, one another, our children, our country, our well-being and happiness now and in the future, while at the same time co-existing with others in this rapidly changing global community.

Madam Speaker, to be able to achieve all these, we would need resources - more resources; an investment that the nation will never regret. The onus therefore, is on the Ministry of Education, on how this trust and investment is maximised for the benefit of every child and family in this nation.

Madam Speaker, having said all these, I am pleased and confident that the Government's vision on education is well captured and reflected both in the current 2014 Budget and expanded in the coming year, 2015.

Madam Speaker, in the 2014 Budget, the Ministry of Education received one of the largest allocations of any Fijian budget, whereby the Government introduced and strengthened free tuition for students in the nation's primary and secondary school students.

However, in 2015, the landmark initiative will be expanded further to provide free tuition for those children in the final year of kindergarten at accredited pre-schools since this was a neglected area for some times. It is encouraging to note that assistance has trickled down to this important age group.

Madam Speaker, the 2015 Budget have opened up access to education for many children from different family backgrounds throughout Fiji through the different initiatives, both at school and system levels.

Madam Speaker, as we know, the 2015 Budget for the Ministry of Education is \$401.6 million, which is 8.4 per cent or \$30.7 million, an increase above the 2014 Budget. Now that the work towards providing access to education for children is forging ahead; the other side of the same coin is quality. Quality would need to be factored in every aspect of education. In essence, this increase in budget, the Government though the Ministry of Education would be able to strengthen work on both access to education (tuition, bus fare vouchers, et cetera) and quality education (learning materials; teachers; infrastructure, curriculum, et cetera)

Madam Speaker, this is an opportunity of a lifetime for children and their families. We should not let this opportunity slip away from us. We, as Members of this august Parliament, need to look beyond our differences and come together for the sake of our children and their future. Education is everyone's business, including us. This correct message about education should be announced, preached and taken to every corner of this nation. No Fijian child should be left behind for that matter.

Madam Speaker, Article 13 of the 1966 UN's International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises the right of everyone to education, and I am pleased to say that the Government is responding positively to these kinds of international conventions. Therefore, there is no sinister motive in these initiatives. I would say no religion, culture and tradition or otherwise should stop a child from attending school.

Madam Speaker, Chapter 2, Section 31 (1) under the Bill of Rights in the 2013 Constitution stipulates that every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education, and further education.

Madam Speaker, on the Ministry of Health Budget 2015, Fijians should have access to adequate health care services, including those living in the rural areas. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is responsible for providing the people of Fiji with health care that is of the standard appropriate for a nation of our size and means.

Madam Speaker, Government has allocated \$269.7 million to the Ministry, to provide support for this programme in 2015. This is an increase of 23.3 per cent or \$47.3 million above the 2014 Budget.

Chapter 2, Section 38(1) under the Bill of Rights in the 2013 Constitution stipulates the right to health. It is encouraging to note that the Government is working towards achieving this goal. Towards this end, the Government will either upgrade or construct new hospitals next year. For instance, the construction of low risk Makoi Maternity Unit, tagged at \$5,482,893; the construction of a new Ba Hospital at \$17.5 million; the construction of the Nausori Hospital at a cost of \$4 million; the upgrading of the Keiyasi Health Centre at the cost of \$2.2 million and the upgrading and extension of the Rotuma Hospital at \$2.4 million.

Madam Speaker, coming to urban centres for the required health services would now be a thing of the past, as services are now decentralised.

Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport: Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note the emphasis now placed on the two areas that in my view have been long neglected and these are the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) and Fiji Roads Authority (FRA).

It is no wonder that they have been given the biggest slice of the 2015 Budget and they rightly deserve it, to provide Fijians the best of service. We know that this widespread water problems around Fiji would be amicably solved. The WAF has been allocated the Budget of \$239.2 million.

Madam Speaker, the FRA has been allocated the budget of \$638 million for 2015. Government has improved the state of the nation's roads, bridges and jetties, one of its top priorities. Building modern roads, bridges, and jetties increases economic activities, empowers ordinary people and enhances their prosperity and security in order for Fiji to reach its potential in business, education, health or in any other sector. That is why the Government must make a constant investment in the nation's infrastructure.

Once again the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, through the Water Authority of Fiji and the Fiji Roads Authority, is providing the access and quality services to the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, my comments for the Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation side of the Ministry. Poverty is a worldwide phenomenon with universal applicability to human society.

A definition of poverty by Mathilde Snel and with your permission, Madam Speaker, I quote:

“Poor people do not have enough food, clothing, education and health care, their basic civil and human rights are non-existent.”

The term “poverty alleviation” aims to reduce the negative impact of poverty on the lives of poor people, but in a more sustainable and permanent way. It includes the State’s social grant programmes which alleviate the impact of poverty for many poor people.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, has been allocated a budget of \$44.8 million for 2015. This is an increase in funding of \$4.4 million from this year 2014. This Ministry takes care of women, children and poverty stricken sector of our society. The increase in the budget for the Ministry is very much welcomed by the people. The Ministry supports Government’s effort to break down barriers created by gender, age, and economic standing. Poverty is key challenge that Government will continue to tackle over the medium term.

Madam Speaker, the 2008 and 2009 Household Income and Expenditure Survey Report shows that the percentage of population in poverty has declined from 35 per cent in 2002 to 31 per cent in 2008 and 2009, while the urban poverty has decreased within the same period from 28 per cent to 19 per cent.

The rural poverty has remain high at around 43 per cent. To achieve the desired poverty reduction outcomes, Government is committed and will continue to support existing social protection programmes such as:

- (a) Poverty Benefit Scheme
- (b) Child Protection Allowance
- (c) Social Pension Scheme
- (d) Food Voucher Programme; and
- (e) The Bus Subsidy

The Poverty Benefit Scheme has been allocated \$22 million, the Child Protection Allowance, \$2.2 million, the Social Pension Scheme, \$8 million, the Food Voucher Programme, \$1 million, the Bus Subsidy, \$150,000.

Madam Speaker, there is no other word to describe these initiatives but one which demonstrate love and care for all Fijians....

HON. GOVT. MEMBER. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA. –...particularly those who are disadvantaged through their circumstances; namely senior citizens, orphans, people and families with special needs.

Madam Speaker, for the Department of Women, the honourable Minister for Women had elaborated earlier on the Budget details in her budget speech. The Department of Women is responsible for providing Fijian women and girls, particularly those in rural communities with the skills and education they need to participate as equal members of society.

The Ministry's work is to provide the necessary support to enable women and girls to bring about positive changes for themselves, their families, their communities and the nation as a whole.

Madam Speaker, the department have four programmes and they are:

- (a) Women Plans of Action with the allocation of \$1 million;
- (b) The Women Federation with the allocation of \$160,000;
- (c) The NGO Grants with the allocation of \$150,000; and
- (d) Fiji National Women's Expo with the allocation of \$500,000.

The funding has been allocated to host the 2nd Annual Fiji National Women's Expo, which is focussed on creating a platform for rural women's group to market their products. This follows the success of the first expo held in August 2014.

Madam Speaker, may I take this opportunity to acknowledge with appreciation the input by the former Minister for Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation and her staff for the great success of the 2014 Expo.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA. – It was one of a kind and it needs to be repeated with improvement, in terms of access and quality.

HON. MEMBERS. - Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA. - On behalf of the honourable Minister for Women, I wish to make an open invitation to all the gentlemen in this Parliament....

HON. MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA. –...to support this national initiative for next year, 2015.

To the honourable Minister for Women and your team, we wish you well in the coming 2015 events and we will be there to support you and your staff in this worthy cause.

Madam Speaker, I rise fully support and endorse the 2015 Appropriation Bill.

To conclude, the 2015 Budget is a positive, dynamic, innovative, inclusive, bold and forward looking one.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA. - The master plan has been drawn, the onus now is on the implementers - the respective Ministries working in partnership with their stakeholders.

May I once again thank the honourable Minister for Finance and his team for putting together the 2015 Budget and I also thank all the Members of this august Chamber for your constructive contributions, and I wish each and every Member of this Chamber, all the very best in the different roles in serving the people of this nation.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU. – Madam Speaker, I rise to add my voice to the 2015 Government Budget, presented by the honourable Minister of Finance and would like to focus on the programmes being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture. Before I move on Madam Speaker, let me first offer my gratitude to the honourable Minister of Finance, for the funds allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture and my appreciation goes also to all the senior civil servants for their hard work, together with the private sector as well as the general public for their input into the Budget. I believe, that the theme of this Budget, “Turning Promises into Deeds” augurs well for Fiji, and should bring about another year of a strong and sustained economic expansion that will benefit all Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU. –...Madam Speaker, I would briefly like to comment on some of the arguments of the Budget that have been advanced by honourable Members doing the course of this Budget debate.

Madam Speaker, ever since, the 2015 Budget presentations have described it as “unrealistic borrowing”, “unsustainable economically.” However, you will notice that the Opposition fails to provide Parliament with alternatives - good alternatives.

Madam Speaker, the annual budget presents the Government’s expenditure plans as expected, and the expected revenue for the year. This is common knowledge amongst all honourable Members of Parliament and both Government and the Opposition, however, some of the contributions to the Budget debate by Members of the Opposition is a clear show of ignorance and deliberate attempts to drag their feet on the Budget.

Agriculture is so important and I beg the other side of the Chamber not to drag on this because we feed everyone in Fiji. I urge this Parliament to understand the Government’s long term vision of creating an enabling environment for investment through funding of large capital infrastructure like roads, water and electricity supply. This will open up development of resources in most rural areas previously untapped, and facilitate better market access for increased export and sustained economic growth.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, was delivered on the promises that the FijiFirst Party made during the Elections campaign. It is really a Statement of Intent by Government, “Turning Philosophy into Programmes and Promises into Deeds.” We will continue to do that, for we have the confidence and the mandate of the Fijian people and with the firm belief that such initiatives addresses the very basic needs of ordinary citizens.

Madam Speaker, this Budget is no gimmick or quick fix, but it is for the long-term benefit of all Fijians. Before I touch on the Ministry for Agriculture allocation, let me just clarify a few issues, as raised during the Budget Debate by honourable Members on the other side of the Chamber. One, on Sugar. We all know the importance of sugar to the economy and of course, we all would love to see the sugar industry excel and perform even better as it was in previous years, but let us not shy away from the mistakes and failures of yesteryears. I bring this to the attention of this Parliament because we have been probably misled through some of the statements that have been made previously.

If we go back to 1997, Madam Speaker, most of the leases were on the verge of expiring or had already expired. These leases were not renewed because of race based politics of yesteryears. If one goes to Qila in Taveuni, there are people from the sugarcane belts who have been relocated, likewise in Delaivuna in Taveuni. Also, in Raiwaqa and Vakabalea in Navua and the Jittu Estate, these are people who were relocated from the sugarcane belt areas because of failures of previous governments.

Agriculture is so important to the economy, Madam Speaker, and I hope that we will not politicise the land issue. Let me quote from the words of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna in 1936 at a meeting in Bau, where he said:

“It is thoroughly understood that the control of our lands is in our hands but the owner of property has an important duty to perform. It is the bounded duty of all landowners to utilise what they possess for the benefit of all”.

Some landowners neglect his duty to the State, should he be holding more than he can utilise? He should lease the surplus to those who can make use of it. This is why I insist that as leaders of the Fijian people, it is our duty to use our influence and power to open up waste *mataqali* lands for agricultural purposes, whether they be taken up by Europeans, Indians or Fijians.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, the point I wish to raise is, land is so important for Fiji as well as the sugar industry, but let us learn from the mistakes of yesteryears. Let us not politicise land and that leads me to the next issue that I wish to clarify, as was raised by the honourable Dulakiverata on the Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL).

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Give it to him.

(Laughter)

HON. LT.COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, CBUL complements iTLTB. If there is one, apart from other stakeholders that are great beneficiaries out of CBUL, it is also iTLTB because in 2008, Government came up with the initiative to establish CBUL so that the expired leases can be renewed with the top up of four per cent lease subsidy so that landowners can make land available.

On that note, as Minister responsible for CBUL, I wish to convey Government's appreciation to the landowners and landowning units for their kind heart and generosity in making land available so that our economy can grow.

Madam Speaker, let me assure the *Turaga Tui Cakau* that Government has a “Look North Policy.” From 2002, we had the “Look North Policy”, but there was not much done until 2007. They were talking North, but nothing was done in the North.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, this programme called the “Northern Development Programme” is only for the Northern Division, allocating money for small and medium enterprises just to help the establishment of small and micro enterprises so that the people in the North can also benefit.

Madam Speaker, the latest World Bank Report says that in the last reporting period, urban poverty has decreased, whereas rural poverty has increased, but only for the Northern Division, it decreased. That shows that the Northern Development Programme which Government started funding from 2008 is in fact, contributing to the elimination of poverty in the Northern Division.

(Chorus of interjections)

The honourable Nawaikula talked about tractors this morning, Madam Speaker. The Ministry for Agriculture, through the “Demand Driven Approach Programme”, provided five tractors to the farming community from 2009 to 2013. This is not new, Madam Speaker. The reality of farming in Fiji is that most of our farmers do subsistence farming. So, if you want to grow the economy through agriculture and for them to produce more, we need to use technology, we need to mechanise and this is why farmers are arguing for such assistance.

One would note that in the 2015 allocation, this has been separated from the DDA programme. There is a special allocation for farm machinery and Government has allocated \$800,000 next year so that more farmers can benefit from this initiative. I would urge other honourable Members in this Parliament to please bring the farmers in, especially those who have land available so that they can also benefit from this scheme.

On road side markets, as raised by the honourable Gavoka and of course, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, it is already in Government’s plan. In August, we launched a Fiji Agriculture Policy Agenda and it talks about the whole value chain from the farmer right through to the market. We are also looking at enablers within the value chain and the markets being one. I wish to assure the Parliament and of course, the honourable Member that Government will seriously look into this and assist in whatever way it can.

Madam Speaker, in the context of the rapidly changing economic and trade environment with impending real effects of global climate change, the agricultural sector needs to develop strategic policy responses to address a number of critical issues. Without going into the details, we have already started with the Agriculture Policy Agenda for Fiji. Not only that, Madam Speaker, after a lapse of 17 years, we have also revived the Fiji Agricultural Journal. This is where all successful agricultural researches are published, because agriculture has to be aggressively driven by research and of course, market surveys. On top of that, Madam Speaker, tomorrow we will also for the first time be launching Fiji’s Farm Management Manual. For those on the other side who are farmers, we will sell this to you ...

(Laughter)

... because you are rich. However, this would be launched tomorrow and I will encourage all farmers in Fiji to have a copy of the Farm Management Manual.

Why am I bringing this to the attention of this Chamber is that, Fiji’s agriculture sector, if it has to grow, it has to be relevant and pro-active. The dynamics of the environment has changed significantly. We need to be managing change well in Government. That is why we need to review the policies, and the agricultural sector has taken the first initiative to review its agricultural policies.

Madam Speaker, we will also be issuing Industry Plans very shortly. There will be a plan for the dairy sector, coconut industry, beef industry and we will be launching these plans for the benefit of all Fijians, particularly our farmers.

Agriculture Research; Madam Speaker, features research is very critical for Fiji, particularly for the development of agriculture. The honourable Dr. Biman Prasad, who unfortunately has left proposed in his response to the Budget Address that we bring red pontiac potatoes from Australia because New Zealand is a temperate country and Fiji is a tropical one. I regret to say, Madam Speaker, and of course I concur with the statements made by the honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy that we received information from outside of Parliament yesterday.

The honourable Dr. Biman Prasad does not know that the Ministry of Agriculture in Fiji is already planting red pontiac potatoes. We have made trials this year in Tailevu - Dawasamu, RKS, Naveicovatu in Wainibuka, Lomaivuna and Vunidawa in Naitasiri, Naitonitoni in Serua/Namosi, Raiwaqa in Nadroga and of course, in Nabukelevu and Nakasaleka in Kadavu. Definitely next year, I will make sure, for the benefit of the honourable Dr. Biman Prasad, that it will be planted in Muanidevo, Dreketi and of course in Taveuni as well. I have a tray in the vehicle but these are our seeds for next year, I know that there is a shortage of potatoes, but it is the golden goose that I need to keep for next year. I will not go into the details of the budget as allocated to the Ministry.

According to the World Bank Poverty Report, it states that most rural households derive their earnings from agriculture. We have talked a lot in this Parliament about poverty. Most rural Fijians depend on agriculture for their livelihood and I wish to urge all honourable Members and also assure you, Madam Speaker that we as a Ministry are doing our best to take agriculture through to the 2020 Agriculture Policy Agenda – taking agriculture to the next level. However, we cannot do it alone.

I have talked about the outdated laws, legislations and policies that we have, within the context of the environment that we are in. During the subsequent sittings of Parliament next year, we will be tabling some legislations that need to be amended and reviewed and I ask the honourable Members of the Parliament for their support because agriculture affects everyone, and it is so important to all of us. I hope that we will be given that due attention so that we can raise productivity and of course contribute more to GDP. The potential of agriculture in Fiji is huge but we have to break away from the practice of subsistence farming that we are currently in, and we have to raise production to much higher levels. We need to reduce our import bills and of course, raise our export levels as well. We are able to do it, Madam Speaker.

Land is so important to all of us. Livestock, we have certain allocations next year for sheep and cattle breeding. Over the years, we have only been allocating money for research. Technology has never been transferred to the farmers. Next year, for the first time in the 2015 Budget, we will have allocations for this, and for that we need a lot of land.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- We are ready.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I wish and hope that the honourable Members of this Parliament and all the leaders who are here will use their influence to participate so that agriculture can move forward and of course contribute more to GDP. I thank you for your attention, Madam Speaker.

HON. DR. N.P. SHARMA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Appropriations Bill, Bill No. 1 of 2014. I will overview the Bill with comments on some global trends, regional comparisons and national health developments over the last six years. More specifically, I will focus on the Appropriations Bill as it relates to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services – Head 22. Health remains a basic human right based on WHO, the lead health agency of the United Nations, our very own 2013 Fiji Constitution, the FijiFirst Government's Manifesto and the subsequent Appropriation Bill themed "Turning Promises into Deeds".

Fiji is uniquely placed in the region with only 3.1 per cent per GDP ratio and a 9 per cent health to total budget ratio. Our neighbours, Tonga, Samoa and Solomon Islands have a much higher health per GDP ratio between 7 per cent and 10 per cent. However, their funding allocation is largely international partners and donor-based. In Fiji, well over 95 per cent of our allocations are Government funded and sourced through taxation. Our international partners and global organisations seriously recommend a 0.5 per cent incremental increase annually to resuscitate our health care system to wellness. Despite our comparative healthier status in the region, and this has been achieved with this new Bill. The crux of fiscal support to various ministries in a developing State lies within the context of limited resource sharing while sustaining national development. One must take cognition of education and health as an important marker of socio economic development to fuel national development. Likewise, trade and commerce and public health need an “all of Government” convergence” if we are to breed and rear healthy Fijians.

The Ministry of Health requires three components for increase fiscal injections into the system as it stands today:

- (a) Increased international and global partnerships;
- (b) Increase the efficiency in service delivery, including resourcing for increased efficiency/deficiency; and
- (c) a marked reduction in wastage of medical consumables and pharmaceutical items.

I will now be addressing each one of them in turns.

Increased international global partnerships: Whilst reviewing the budget trends in the last five years, we note that despite all political barriers, there was a progressive increase in international and global support for our health system from \$6 million in 2009 to just under \$30 million in 2014. Much can be achieved with the return to democracy, if we follow the same strategies in the rules of engagement. This international partner support arrives in the form of policy, technical assistance and strengthening grassroots operational development.

Increased efficiency in service delivery include resourcing for increased efficiency: Improve technologies when infrastructure upgrades had an unprecedented progress in the system with greater tertiary care now available locally. Fewer overseas referrals are already resulting in more specialities and available locally from 2013 to 2014. Human resource in health has taken time, as we could not reproduce or fill gaps for doctors, nurses and allied health workers overnight. The Fijian pay structure does not appear lucrative to expatriates and local professionals who will demonstrate great apathy in the recruitment process.

The budget allocations from 2010 to 2014 have resulted in the following increases from our local pool. By decree, 1500 nurses in 2009, now stands at 2,400 and projected to increase to 3,500 by 2018, with positions already earmarked in the Civil Service.

Also by decree, 75 new doctors from both medical schools, join the workforce annually to 2018 with pegged positions in place. By decree again, 400 plus positions in allied health workers have been created and will be factored over the same four-year period.

Madam Speaker, just to remind you that Allied Health Workers are dental technologists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, lab scientists, imaging technologists, dieticians, physiotherapists and health inspectors.

Serial increases in human resources in health has been factored into each subsequent appropriation bill earmarked for 2014 to 2018. Increase efficiency in any health industry, remains problematic when the corporate staff remains uncaring to the needs of the professional cadre. When the public service is no longer the civil servants guide.

There are far too many temporary relieving clerks, who progress to clerical positions and on ward to administrative officer and assistant accountant positions without reputed credentials. All and sundry have had their Minimum Qualification Requirements waived. Interestingly, when the Appropriation Bills come to the end of their cycles and the Office of the Auditor-General makes his observations, the Ministry of Health only manages a qualified audit report invariably. Reconciliation of trusts accounts and trade and manufacturing accounts, are never completed repeatedly.

The Opposition has rightly noted the fourth quarter rush to complete capital projects and programmes. In fact, our civil servants are known to snail-pace programmes, as they detest changes in management style and regular phased work. Funds unutilised, then revert to the Finance pool. Alternative uses undertaken, capital works then shift into lower gear until the next Appropriations are made available.

The third item - Marked reduction in wastage of medical consumables and pharmaceutical items: Misuse of appropriated allocations in the past has resulted from sourcing procurement, wrongful overstocking, poor warehousing, misuse of pharmaceuticals, medical consumables including laboratory reagents and improper distribution of such items.

Much gain has been realised in the last six years. Medical consumables and pharmaceutical wastage of \$0.8 million was halved in 2009, as my first assignment. On average, wastage of over \$1.5 million in 2008, has been tapped to under \$330,000 in 2013. These are accumulated items over the last several years. We were in a downward trajectory and the system needs strengthening, almost daily.

The breakdown of \$300,000 was \$80,000 for medication through right-sizing, purchases and balance for laboratory reagents - \$250,000 due to equipment changeover and unthinking personnel. In appropriate orders, low utilised items ordered, overstocked, some beyond five years are being addressed by investigation. Madam Speaker, these are challenges of utilising the appropriate sum vigilantly.

Appropriation Bill No. 1 of 2014, which is a work in progress Bill factor in the unfinished development in healthcare 2013, and needs to be complemented. There are some planned work which have been way laid by senior health management in its preparation to the Budget subcommittee presumably.

The foundations of the mental health institute need to be progressed with donor agencies now, more than ever. The radio-oncology or cancer hospital 'proposal' to be progressed with great concerns about increasing incidence of cancer in Fiji and the region.

The NCD bus for the North is already under construction and no allocation is noted in this Bill. The mobile pathology lab proposal is not to be cited in the Appropriation Bill.

A large Ministry where the need for electronic recordkeeping and digital records are being planned in 2014 and it cannot run without its appropriate level of information technology manpower, I do not see the appropriate fund allocations.

Looking at the free medicine concept, this allocation of \$8 million must be fully analysed, studied and full-proofed by all stakeholders. The new medicinal products in pharmacists professional degrees must be given credence and enforcement. The Government Bulk Purchase Scheme, the Commerce commission, Consume Council, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Pharmaceutical Society, Retail and Wholesale Pharmaceutical Companies, the Fiji College of General Practitioners and possibly the medical insurance companies must all be clear before the allocation is put to their use. Standards in procurement, storage, distribution, mark ups and the systems to debar misuse must be established.

Madam Speaker, this is more of a caution as the private medical sector has had experience with fraud involving retail pharmacists with private health insurance companies in the past, and I for one, would not want our Appropriation Bill allocation ending in strife.

The Tertiary Hospital proposal has great vision and merit for all Fijians and as a referral centre for the Region. The \$2 million grant by Government will start the preliminary scoping, functional assessments on what is needed, technology needs and services will be covered based on needs. The exact needs must be identified before we move. There have been several bites of the cherry in the past but we need caution and phase programming.

With the return of democracy, various government to government options will pan out. This may in turn, turn out to be the icing in 2018 for the FijiFirst Party.

Honourable Members, I recommend the Bill for your consideration.

HON. B. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, honourable Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, members of the media, members of the public in the public gallery, and the Fijians who are watching this Budget forum in the comfort of their homes, *bula sia!*

Madam Speaker, we leaders have a patriotic duty and responsibility to build and promote sustainability. The 2015 Budget Estimates provides a perfect vehicle for united action precisely across the political and cultural spectrums. Everyone should be ready to rise above sectional interest and with great maturity, pool together limited resources to take this country forward.

Madam Speaker, like my colleagues on this side of the Chamber, I rise to support the 2015 Budget before this august Parliament. In doing so, I would like to congratulate the honourable Minister of Finance for continuing with the bold strategies that are providing the engine for growth, economic stability and geared towards stimulating pro-small to medium enterprise growth in our country.

I would like to thank the honourable Minister and his team for their hard work in producing this Budget, which is appreciated by the people of this country. There is overwhelming support for the Budget by majority of the people. Indeed, it is a balanced Budget and reflects the Government's commitment and services to the Fijians. The evidence of growth in all sectors of the economy is there for all of us to see. Indeed, the level of consistent growth, four years in a row, is a commendable achievement.

Madam Speaker, excellence in service delivery to the Fijians remains a cornerstone of what the Government intends to do. This is reflected in the provisions of the 2015 Budget. Our people in villages and rural settlements, as well as those in the maritime, have been given the Government's priority. We have provided, amongst other things, proper water reticulation, housing, electricity and

infrastructure with better provisions for health services, budget increase in education, dramatic growth in small-medium enterprise and up scaling interventions for poverty reduction and transformation on the lives of the Fijians.

In this regard, Government would focus programmes to advance entrepreneurship amongst women, youth and people with disabilities, to effectively contribute to job creation and economic growth. Envisaged support measures will include access to finance, business skills development, competitiveness, advancing localisation, as well as leveraging on public procurement.

These elements will all be achieved through enhanced coordination and transversal agreements with Government entities and State-Owned Companies (SOCs), whilst ensuring measurable accountability of State institutions in support of small business and cooperatives.

Partnership with the private sector is also envisaged, that will allow for further integration of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and co-operatives into the main stream economy. SMEs worldwide are treated as the engine for growth and drivers of innovations. SMEs plays a significant role in driving economic growth and generating employment. The rate of business creation in any jurisdiction indicates the rate of innovation and thereby indicates the rate of growth. Private sector is the main driver of growth in today's world and majority of the private enterprises are SMEs. In true sense, inclusive growth can only be achieved through a vibrant SME sector in a country like Fiji.

It is heartening to note, Madam Speaker, that the Fijian Government has rightly identified SME sectors as the priority sector for transformation of Fiji into a middle income country, as alluded to by the honourable Minister for Agriculture in the "Look North Policy". It is working and we could see that the "Look North Policy" in SMEs has really impacted the economy. In line with Government's thrust, ANZ has been instrumental in designing and implementing SME sector development initiatives as part of its development financing agenda.

Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the efforts of the Australia and New Zealand Bank (ANZ) that initiated and tailored Small and Medium Enterprise product in April 2012, aligning itself to the Government's objectives then. The financial institution was the cornerstone of commitment towards development and growth of the SMEs into the Fijian economy.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's SMEs account for around 12 per cent to 14 per cent of the economic activity in this country, thus still largely untapped. Therefore, our potential for growth is large whilst considering SMEs in a developing country which contributes as much as 40 per cent to 60 per cent of GDP. It is evident that the SME sector accounts for about 90 per cent of businesses and more than 50 per cent of employment worldwide. They are the key engines of job creation and economic growth in developing countries like Fiji.

Creating opportunities for SMEs is the key way to advance development and reduce poverty, and a strategic priority for the Government. Public Private Partnership has a critical role to play in supporting the growth of SMEs in Fiji. Our Government is building and maintaining an enabling and supportive environment, conducive to growth and development. Taking the ever increasing demand for jobs into consideration, we, the Fijian Government, has taken promotion of enterprise creation, entrepreneurship development and self-employment as the key policy strategy for job creation. The Government has incorporated various programmes and initiatives. We have engaged and are continuously trying to further engage private sector in the SME development initiatives. Our Government is committed to putting SMEs at the centre of business decision-making, to give SMEs

the whole of Government visibility and impetus. The Government recognises the importance of providing small business owners with the best information possible, to improve business practices and better prepare our SMEs compete domestically and internationally.

Madam Speaker, as alluded to by the honourable Minister for Local Government, the initiatives taken by the Ministry, and I quote:

“To promote small and medium business, ventures in this section will benefit from the current recommendation for a new fee structure under the Business License Act.”

According to the RBF, SMEs in Fiji provide for almost 12 per cent to 14 per cent of the GDP, but has the potential to do better. Currently in Fiji we have almost 4,200 registered SMEs and their business ranges in agriculture, fishing, manufacturing and retailing and tourism sectors.

Furthermore, it is estimated that about 60 per cent of the labour force in Fiji is involved in various forms of SME business. However, the sad part has been that only 8 per cent to 10 per cent of lending by the Banks are to the SMEs. Improved SME competitiveness could obviously contribute to economic and social development, and poverty reduction.

The Fijian Government believes that the SME plays a vital role in generating revenue and employment for Fiji. Keeping in mind the various advantages and growth the SMEs can bring to Fiji, the Government has for the first time given various incentives to name a few:

- (a) Extend the scope of SME Income Tax Incentive to cover the whole agriculture sector.
- (b) All mortgages related to the agriculture sector and all SMEs will be exempted from Stamp Duty payments.
- (c) Reduce the Commercial Agriculture incentives minimum initial level of investment from \$2 million to \$250,000 in line with the Tax Free Threshold and can get between 5–13 years tax holidays.

Therefore, SMEs plays a critical role in maintaining both the social and economic health of our local and regional communities. The success of SMEs contributes to the success of all economies.

Fijian SME owners are optimistic, motivated, diligent and hard-working, Madam Speaker. I applaud and encourage their continuing work and risk-taking enterprise. The Government has committed to engaging the Fijian SMEs and have every chance to thrive and grow in a competitive economic.

Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to endorse this Budget as one of the best in Fiji’s history and a very viable one for today’s and tomorrow’s Fiji.

Madam Speaker, may I close my speech by wishing everyone in this august Chamber, the Parliament Secretariat and the support staff a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Budget debate which the honourable Minister of Finance presented to this Chamber.

Madam Speaker, the 2015 Appropriations Bill has been scrutinised during the Parliamentary debate for the last few days and we have had some very good debate on either side of the Chamber. I

would like to remind honourable Members on the other side of the Chamber that the Opposition is not blabbering. What Opposition is doing, is providing some sound advice on the policy that was enacted by them and this policy, Madam Speaker, will come to light in a couple more years of them being here.

Madam Speaker, we have heard some self-proclaimed professors in the sugar industry this morning, some from Raigarh universities and also those who are in the making and who will contribute later.

A national budget is an important statement for all our people. It lays the Income and Expenditure Statement of the Government for the ensuing year. More importantly, Madam Speaker, a budget is supposed to be a statement of confidence, unity and a national strategy for development of a nation and its people.

The \$3.36 billion Budget has been described as a “mother of all budgets” by honourable Members on the other side of this Chamber. We have heard stories of stones changing into rocks in quick time as they are pushed from a road. We have also heard of the sky shining brightly, making me wonder if the sun, moon and the stars that have shone brightly before the history of mankind have suddenly disappeared. Furthermore, we have heard of the need for the Opposition to get listening and hearing aids and to see things carefully.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Member from Ba can be rest assured that we have certainly been listening and watching things carefully as far as conduct, as they say in sporting terms “on and off the field” is concerned. But it would be unparliamentary for me to report on those observations.

Madam Speaker, I do understand that the Government is overly concerned about its electoral promises. However, Government should not be driven by its narrow political interests, but to take heed of where our nation is heading. It is important that the Budget is used to build productive capacity in our economy. Our debt level is steadily rising. What future are we bequeathing our children and grandchildren? As the saying goes, “Blessed are the youth because they will inherit the national debt.”

One perfectly understands Government’s aim of creating economic growth and attracting greater investment, but investments, apart from being based on external factors, is dependent on confidence and confidence is a fickle thing. In this regard Madam Speaker, I have serious doubts about the revenue forecast of \$3.1 billion for next year. We can see that apart from Government’s intention to borrow \$366 million, the reduction in deficit is reliant on sale of profitable state assets that the honourable Minister of Finance describes as “divesting Government shares”. As the saying goes, “it is the same difference”, whether you sell or divest shares, it means the same thing.

Madam Speaker, selling off profitable State assets for the purpose of balancing our books or reducing deficit is like selling ones soul for 30 pieces of silver. Government is proposing to sell three key assets, namely Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL), Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) and the Airports Fiji Limited (AFL). It would have made sense if non-profitable State assets, statutory organisations or Government Commercial Companies are sold or Government shares divested (as they like to put it) to cut State losses and make these organisations more efficient in service delivery. But why sell assets that lay the golden eggs? Selling assets basically means privatisation and privatisation means job losses.

The honourable Minister of Finance indicated to Parliament three days ago that talks have already begun on the sale of our airport. Why the secrecy? Why can the Minister of Finance not tell us who the interested buyers are? Madam Speaker, will a new employer honour existing jobs and

collective agreements on the workforce in these State entities? I am sure any new owner or even a majority shareholder will clearly say, “Yes, we are a new legal entity. We do not know your previous agreements. If you want to work for us now, hereon, you will have to work according to terms and conditions that we lay down.”

Madam Speaker, both the Airports Fiji Limited and the Fiji Electricity Authority are very profitable organisations. They are not losing money. In the case of FEA, even if its loans are guaranteed by Government, its financial statements as well as Government guarantees scrutinised by the Auditor General reveal that FEA is more than capable of fulfilling its repayment obligations. Therefore, it makes little commercial sense for Government to sell these assets. Some \$507 million is being forecasted as revenue for the State from these sales. If this is realised, then it caters Government’s appropriation needs in terms of reducing deficit for one year.

What happens in 2016? Will it mean increase borrowing to reduce the deficit or meet our capital and expenditure budgets if the national appropriation sits around the current levels? Will it mean identifying and selling off more of the dwindling list of assets that we have? These are pertinent questions that need to be answered.

Madam Speaker, as the spokesman for National Disaster Management, I see that Government has allocated a sum of \$3 million for disaster rehabilitation and disaster risk and mitigation. I am sure that more funds are needed for disaster rehabilitation and \$1 million allocated specifically to this programme is not enough, given the adverse effects of the drought. While there is provision for more allocation from the Miscellaneous Heads of the Budget, there is no allocation for the dredging of major rivers, particularly Nadi, as parts of Nadi are below sea level.

We all know the natural phenomenon that after a drought, there is always a major flood, the two recent devastating floods of 2009 and 2012 are a testimony to this fact.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the honourable Ministers for Agriculture, Sugar and National Disaster Management should inform this Parliament if any survey has, is, or will be done by their respective Ministries, to assess the impact of drought on agricultural crops, livestock and sugar.

Only a comprehensive survey will be able to determine the kind and amount of assistance and crop rehabilitation packages needed for the recovery of these industries and sectors. With intermittent rain being experienced in the drought affected areas, the time is now right to rehabilitate the crops but this can only be done through proper management and utilisation of funds in the relevant areas.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu spoke about the urgent need to revitalize the sugar industry, through the injection of meaningful and sustained funding. In my maiden speech on 16th October, I had pointed out that the industry’s crop production had declined by 50 per cent. There has been a slight improvement when one looks at the end of the season’s statistics for the 2014 season - cane production is 1.83 million tonnes, with sugar production at 226,000 tonnes. However, Madam Speaker, we are still a long way from achieving a production of more than 3 million tonnes of cane and 300,000 tonnes of sugar.

I see that the Fair Trade Coordinator and Development Manager, Mr. Habib Khan in the media recently. He also emphasized this fact by saying that around 3.6 million tonnes of cane was needed to be produced in the next three years. I could not agree with him more, but if the TCTS ratio of 8 tonnes to 1 tonne of sugar is maintained this season, then three million tonnes of sugarcane will produce 375,000 tonnes of sugar. This will be the ideal minimum benchmark that we should start looking at.

The honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Sugar, while addressing the 46th session of the ISO Council in London on 29th November said, and this will be interesting to the Government Members because it is coming from the honourable Prime Minister, and I quote:

“The abolition of EU sugar production quotas post 30th September, 2017 and the consequent adverse implications on sugar prices pose a very big challenge indeed. Moreover, EU sugar prices have already come under pressure, with significant falls compared to prevailing prices over a year ago. So suppliers like Fiji are having to prepare for a reduction in our export revenues even before 2017 – a sobering prospect for any developing nation”.

Madam Speaker, a sobering prospect indeed. The allocation of \$5 million for cane planting for the last few years has seen little impact in the increase of cane production. Much more is needed. I can see from the Budget that there is a little over \$36 million listed under Head 35 as “Aid in Kind” from the European Union for the social mitigation programme. There is no explanation in the Budget Estimates or in the Supplement as to what this means and the honourable Minister of Finance in his Right of Reply should clarify this.

The issue of expiring leases, Madam Speaker, is a factor that is significantly affecting the productivity of cane farmers, and the industry as a whole.

The *Fiji Sun* on 4th November, 2014 reported under heading “6,284 land leases renewed under the Bainimarama leadership”, and quoting what was stated by the Permanent Secretary for Sugar (Mr. Manasa Vaniqi) that, “reforms undertaken by the Bainimarama-Government in the sugar industry has resulted in the renewal of 6,284 sugarcane land leases.”

However, the official statistics from the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board states otherwise. The statistics show that from 1997 to 2014, a total of 8,151 cane leases have expired. A further 1,373 leases will expire in the next 3 years until 2017, bringing the total to 9,524. Only 5,105 or approximately 53.6 per cent of leases will have been renewed. I can see where the honourable Minister of Agriculture is coming from. No wonder it emanated from him this morning to ask for assistance from the Opposition, to influence the landowners in renewing his leases. I totally agree with him because this is the path that we need to follow.

Between 2007 and 2014, I am just alluding to the honourable Minister when he said that in 1997 the leases were not renewed because we had a racist policy. Government was so racist that they did not renew. Now let me put this to the honourable Minister, between 2007 and 2014, 2,899 cane leases expired, out of this, 1,722 leases have only been renewed. Therefore, Madam Speaker, there is an urgent need to resolve the issue of expiring ALTA leases to have a viable sugar industry beyond 2017.

Madam Speaker, may I come back to the potato issue. The potato, be it any other industry, apart from sugar, before when we used to talk about agriculture, we were all concentrating on sugar, but time has come where we should put our efforts together and have a structured sugar agricultural system. The Ministry of Agriculture, with lots of researches, I hope that they implement those reports. Fiji’s agricultural system has always been plagued by lack of understanding of the system. Sugar industry did do well because of its structure. It was structured by the Colonial Government and I think we can extend that to non-sugar areas. As a compliment to my friend, the new mushroom initiative is producing results at the Legalega Agricultural Station but the constraints are there. It is the

inconsistency in supply and we have market problems, and I am sure the honourable Minister would look at that because that has come at a cost.

Madam Speaker, it is the end of the day for Budget speeches and I would like to refer to one of the correspondence that I just got on the Government's provision in the Budget, which relates to a 32 per cent duty on exercise books and this is from Janty Kanvan Limited, which says:

“To all our valued customers, we regret to announce that there will be a price increase in Express A4 photocopying paper by 10 per cent to 20 per cent effective from 1st December, 2014. We have avoided raising our price for as long as possible, that is for the last six months, however, we can longer prolong the inevitable. The increase in price is due to the following reasons:

- 1) strengthening of US dollar against Fiji dollar by 10 per cent;
- 2) increase in price of raw material by 7 per cent; and
- 3) increase in freight charges by 5 per cent.

We thank you for your past support and know that you will understand the necessity for this price change.” This is what Opposition referred to when they said “Increases in duties to protect a local manufacturer – what effects will it have on the entire population.”

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will now adjourn for lunch and resume at 3.00 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 2.05 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.10 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I hope you all enjoyed your late lunch, however, we will now continue with our agenda for this afternoon.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I would like to express my appreciation to you for giving me this opportunity to speak, share and contribute my views on this very important Budget debate, regarding some very important initiatives mapped out by the honourable Minister of Finance in his 2015 Budget Address, to foster economic growth and development of Fiji, so as to improve and enhance the socio-economic status of all Fijians, regardless of ethnic backgrounds, religious or status.

I congratulate the honourable Minister of Finance and his team of experienced staff in the Ministry for working tirelessly in providing us with this 2015 Budget. The Overview by the honourable Minister of Finance confirmed Government's commitment and promise stated in our Fiji First Manifesto, and I would like to mention some of the key factors highlighted on how to grow the Fiji economy. With your permission, Madam Speaker, may I quote:

- (a) "The Government is creating, that allows the private sector to succeed;
- (b) Creating competitive tax concessions, low interest rates and stable economic policies to produce an environment to easy financing, and rising consumer and business confidence;
- (c) Government has made it a priority to boost our export, reduce our trade deficit and accommodate monetary policies;
- (d) The Government will partner with the private sector, realising the Pillar 5 of the People's Charter for Change, to establish economic conditions that one pro-growth and provide better incentives for investments;
- (e) There is a discussion regarding the creation of venture, capital funding institutions with Government participants to finance new ventures; and
- (f) Government to contain to develop and expand on infrastructure programmes and build on national capacity through investments to improve the quality of our healthy system."

Madam Speaker, I would like to talk on the budget allocation of the Fisheries industry in Fiji. Fisheries represent a very traditional Fijian economic activity, a part of our culture, and a key growth sector for the modern Fijian economy. Therefore, I give my humble thanks to the honourable Minister for Finance in allocating a total sum of \$3.7 million to boost our Fisheries Sector.

Madam Speaker, my contribution will centre on the Aquaculture Sector, under the Fisheries Ministry. Fiji has untapped resources in the following:

- (a) Land: Indigenous Fijian-own 65 per cent of the total land in Fiji, and 20 per cent to 30 per cent of this total land is suitable for aquaculture farming, for example, freshwater prawns and freshwater fish like *tilapia*, and grass cup for commercial farm because the soil type is black loam, mixed with clay and good in water retention;
- (b) Availability of fresh water supply from streams and rivers that are not polluted;
- (c) Human resource with technical experience and knowledge from hatchery and nursery grow harvesting and process ready for marketing;

- (d) The giant Malaysian river prawn technical name, *macrobrachium rosenbergii* which is available in Fiji with the Fisheries Ministry, supplying some free of charge, and major demands for prawns right now; and.
- (e) Market outlet - currently we cannot supply to local markets including our hotels because no one is doing intensive aquaculture farming in Fiji to meet this demand consistently.

Madam Speaker, we have nine students graduating from the Fiji National University, specialising in aquaculture, and one particular student has more than eight years technical experience and knowledge in the aquaculture business. It is very unfortunate that few of these students who had applied for loans to the FDB to purchase a five acre freehold land in Calia, Navua for the construction of 10 ponds (50 x 20 x 1.8 set ups) to set up a first hatchery owned factory. Unfortunately, the loans were declined because they could not provide the cash contributions and the RBF to fund that project. The import substitution and export, ICISRFF that the Ministry to support and approve in writing that it is a viable investment. Well, our Government is providing a \$1,000 grant to start a small business on this scale.

Firstly, funding of \$500,000 for the Marine Resource Inventory Survey takes stock of marine and secondly, Government is also providing \$500,000 to establish the Multi-Hatchery in Coboni in Ra. This project will assist with the various fish species to open up opportunities for agriculture production and export, and general supplementary income and employment opportunities for fish farmers.

Madam Speaker, a further \$400,000 is provided to assist farmers who want to start their own aquaculture farms.

Madam Speaker, there are youths of today and with their ultimate vision is to take ownership in rolling Fiji's economy to create job opportunities, poverty alleviation, improving living standards, food security, reduce our import on prawns and meet our local demands, et cetera. They have proposed to set up training facilities in Navua to train youths from my province, Naitasiri, Serua, Namosi and Tailevu, and can reach out to other islands in Fiji. Two weeks on the job training, (this is a proposal by the youths) is to enable the unemployed youths to set up their own aquaculture farm, especially on prawn farming.

Madam Speaker, from the bottom of my heart, I would like to say thank you to the Government in allocating this \$400,000 for 2015 for aquaculture to assist farmers who want to start their own aquaculture farms. I would strongly recommend the Government to assist these youths, to realise their dreams by funding their projects.

Madam Speaker, the first Budget by the Bainimarama-Government sets up a benchmark in moving forward the economy of Fiji, and the wellbeing of its people. It makes the transition from an economy, dominated by the privileged classes, to an economy where opportunities are more evenly spread out. It is a beginning only, and by the time of the next Budget, I firmly believe the benefits will have started to emerge. We must never look back to the old system. We must at all times look to the future with new ideas, and good will towards each other in doing what is good for our families, and our fellow citizens of all Fijians.

There is a big challenge as well, Madam Speaker. The responsible Ministers will need to take control and drive their respective Ministries forward to achieve Government's aims and objectives in the interest of all the people of Fiji. This is not the time for complaints. Individual backbenchers like

me need to be at the sharp end and identify the needs and proper focus for delivering Government programmes and services at grassroots level. However, it has to be a team effort. I particularly welcome Government initiatives in the agricultural sector. Overall, there is something for everyone. I appreciate there is not enough money to fill every need, but there is enough to make real progress.

We need to encourage farmers in established and new industries alike, not only by domestic policies but also in having a robust representation in our overseas representatives, in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture and direct representative from across the board in our agricultural industry.

As the honourable Members may be aware, I have a special interest in developing less established areas in agriculture such as ginger (where I come from) papaya and cocoa.

Honourable Members, we have magnificent soil and a climate very suitable for increasing production in these areas, especially for export where much higher returns are available. The challenges are to introduce modern and efficient methods of production and a better system of marketing. These are areas where the Ministry of Agriculture, with the able direction of the honourable Minister and Assistant Minister, are poised to make significant contributions to the growth of lesser economy and the local economy of areas of production.

Let us put politics aside and all work together in achieving these objectives. Let us not forget our ongoing efforts to make Fiji self-sufficient in all types of food. For a country blessed with our natural resources, we should be able to do a great deal more, to boost local production of meat, dairy product and some vegetable crops. I note the recent shortage of potatoes and the difficulty in establishing a potato industry and the effort being made to overcome this temporary difficulty.

I also note the recent report comments from Raj Khal of Flour Mills of Fiji (FMF) food group that his group wishes to source more ingredients from local source. There is a market, and it is in the national interest that we do all we can to meet that market.

The non-sugar agriculture sector, even though it has still not reached its potential by a long way, it still contributes seven per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

As I have said, there is a great deal of potential for expansion and not just by big companies, but by a group of small farmers, binding together in cooperative and with the assistance of the Ministry, to greatly improve production in terms of quality and quantity by operating together small farmers to increase their bargaining power and capacity to meet their necessary requirements of increasing production and its quality.

Cooperatives of small farmers should be able to be placed on the same footing as big companies for access to finance incentives and tax relief. In this respect, I note the extension of tax exemption to companies in commercial agriculture has been extended to 31st December, 2018.

I also welcome the extension of stamp duty exemption for mortgages in the Agriculture Sector. The challenge will be to persuade commercial lenders to provide adequate finance for this sector. The biggest challenge for small farmers is how to grow a small farm into a bigger and sustainable commercial and viable operations. That requires additional land, equipment and working capital. There are far too many small farmers who are barely subsistence farmers through no fault of their own. In the longer term, we must work to change that. As I have said, the first Budget is a good first step.

I note with interest the extension programme for agriculture, including \$500,000 per ginger sector. I look forward to be part of that programme being delivered in my own province of Naitasiri.

Madam Speaker, I particularly welcome the extension of the fertilizer subsidy scheme to all ginger farmers. This is very important as ginger production requires high level of soil nutrients. It is always good to see that there will be targeted initiatives, in particular areas as provided for in the Budget. However, the challengers are as always, to increase the number of targeted areas and to ensure they are fairly spread.

It would be an enormous assistance to growers in non-targeted areas, if they can be included in a workshop for a few days in their particular areas of interest. This is the best way to open the eyes and ears of all farmers to new technology, new ideas and any emerging opportunities or threats. Best practice should be a national objective in every field, including agriculture in every district.

Madam Speaker, the national objectives will be moved to modern and efficient type of agriculture so that they have access to sufficient suitable land, modern machinery, latest technology, high quality agricultural training, ongoing extension service from the government and access to development working capital per capita. We need to do all these things to move away from subsistence agriculture to best practice agriculture business.

The Government is now allocating \$2.0 million for land claim. A new initiative which will assist farmers who want their land to be cultivated. A certain percentage of farming cost is always devoted to this and the time involved which requires more effort before ploughing and planting. This will be a real life gain by farmers without having to bear this cost. A majority of our land especially the central and eastern part of Viti Levu is covered with African tulips. Clearing has always been a problem in this area which the Government is now providing for.

The farm mechanisation budget of \$800,000 is always an interesting one. These are new concerted efforts of developing farmers away from being subsistence all the time. The provision of farm implement equipment such as tractor brings in more efficiency in the process, leading to increase production. This takes care of tradition time consuming methods which had always eluded farmers from achieving their desired objectives.

Madam Speaker, the challenge now rests on farmers, given that Government had realised their plight by putting forward a budget that is fair and equitable to develop them further. A percentage of capital supplements have been provided for in this Budget. There is always market for our produce with the government taking all necessary efforts to establish and have them ready for us.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, equal distribution of income and better living standards has always been the aim of any good government. A government that realises the needs of the poor in its budget will always be blessed, a simple doctrine which we miss a lot and the 2015 Budget prepares something for everyone. It also requires everyone's effort in working together in achieving our goals. Through our collective efforts we will be able to earn and sustain growth for the years to come.

Madam Speaker and honourable Members, I commend the 2015 national Budget.

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, this week marks an important page in Fiji's history since December, 2006. Fiji's democracy has been held at ransom and this week, we, as a nation finally have a voice in determining where our taxpayers dollars are being spent.

Madam Speaker, this Budget has forgotten about the farmers and is focussed on paying salaries and other administrative costs. Dwight Eisenhower, the 34th President of United States of America once remarked and I quote; “Farming looks mighty easy when your plough is a pen and you are far from the cornfield”. Madam Speaker, when you look at the Budget and you look at the cornfield, it is important to put the plough in the cornfield.

Madam Speaker, the answer to our many agricultural, rural and maritime challenges are in the hands of the farmers, the people who live in communities and not in business houses have proven through this Budget. Madam Speaker, we must cultivate a great dedication to earning a living from the soil through commercial principles to complement the traditional ways of subsistence production.

Madam Speaker, I ask the Minister responsible to simply look North on the island of Taveuni. The Marist Brothers for years funded an agricultural school called the Tutu Training Centre. Tutu trains young famers to be independent and innovative. The students participate in compulsory saving schemes, learn up-to-date agricultural techniques and are encouraged to open their own farms. The Tutu Training Centre has had a major impact on people of the province of Cakaudrove. Nearly 2,000 young people have completed the various courses on offer, over the last 42 years. Most of the graduates from the courses returned to productive lives, earning a livelihood from farming their own land.

Madam Speaker, the Centre offers programmes to prepare community members for rural self-help employment. The courses now offered are for young farmers, married couples and young women.

Madam Speaker, the Government should take a leaf out of Tutu Training Centre and I encourage the Government to send their researchers to places like Tutu, with plans for establishing similar programmes around Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the agricultural sector lacks young blood and energy of our youth. We need to redefine our agricultural potential and make the centre look more lucrative rather than labour intensive.

Madam Speaker, I agree with the Budget earning revolution arising, the agricultural sector and uniting modern day technology and science. I only hope that all farmers will be allocated resources and assistance from Government and not based on who they voted for in the last Elections.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to speak here about the issue of non-cane roads These roads used by *dalo*, *yaqona* and subsistence farmers, I request that we give the same amount of energy and resources, to maintain and build better non-cane all -weather roads and not focus only on cane roads as a priority.

Madam Speaker, let us now touch on Agricultural Marketing Authority. This body is tasked to work with a small holder famers in rural, interior and maritime areas in selling their produce.

Firstly, I have a concern Madam Speaker in the Budget Estimates. The Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA) is given \$1.9 million, however, in the supplement to the 2015 Budget, AMA is expected to receive \$1.5 million. Mathematics and Accounting is proving to be a problem.

(Laughter)

I stand here in this Chamber and ask that AMA be disbanded, for the simple reason being, AMA is purchasing from farmers and selling to local exporters. AMA should be well prepared, if we want to revive it. But judging from experience and from what they have been doing, I think local exporters have been doing fairly well, in terms of marketing their produce.

The influx of capital to fund mega agricultural shows that it is a total waste of taxpayers' money.

Madam Speaker, when I was a district officer, I was expected to host an agricultural show in my district, and draw from my core funding and six sponsorships. This community-based agricultural road shows encourage community participation and portrays meaningful agricultural sharing. We also brought the marketing agents, farmers and the developers into communities and link the policy makers to the farmers.

Madam Speaker, recently this agricultural shows have a urban focus and is another platform where Government agricultural agencies can showcase their so called services.

The Coconut Industry, Madam Speaker, is dropping, and the copra millers in Savusavu have witnessed a significant drop in this commodity.

Madam Speaker, the Asian Pacific Coconut Community Meeting held in Nadi in 2014, ended with participants planting coconut trees at Yadua Village in Nadroga.

The honourable Minister promised the nation to plant one million coconut trees, and it would be interesting Madam Speaker, to know as to how far has this programme reached.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU. - 700,000 already.

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, on livestock, the budget is big on dairy and before I get there, I want to talk to you about the plan to mass introduce genetically modified cattle, goats and pigs into the industry.

The so-called multiplication programme will see fertile livestock artificially inseminated, with genetically modified semen. This so called multiplication programme will also see hybrid or genetically modified livestock brought into the country and made to multiply. The question is why? So Government can save face in their free milk initiative and show Fiji that it can feed their citizens with genetically modified meat and milk.

Madam Speaker, be careful.

(Laughter)

Research has returned with data showing all the 40,000 plus cattle, only two per cent had contacted tuberculosis. For six years now, we have yet to eradicate brucellosis and tuberculosis, and this year, we are spending one million to meet the so called epidemic.

Madam Speaker, there is no plan or road map provided to show how the Ministry of Agriculture is willing to end diseases like brucellosis and tuberculosis. Government is looking to exterminate sick cattle and replace them with new high breed cattle from overseas. This is what livestock rehabilitation programme means for Fiji, and Government is spending \$1 million in this initiative.

Madam Speaker, much have been said about the Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited, formally known as Rewa Dairy Company Limited. The Government CEO in Finance and Agriculture probably know that it would be more sensible and economical to help the small dairy farmers directly in a transparent fashion. When FijiFirst have their minds in the mix, it is a different story, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

I agree that Fiji cannot be built on milk and lamp chops, as stated by a honourable Member on the other side. Fiji must be built on accountability, transparency and a desire to work across barriers.

In saying this, \$500,000 of our taxpayers' money is expected to go to this private company. Of course, Rewa Dairy buys milk from local dairy farmers. That is a fact, unfortunately the majority of work on dairy farmers are on small scale and scattered.

It is extremely costly for Rewa Dairy to buy milk from these small farmers, have local chilling stations and then bring the milk to Nabua for processing. It would be cheaper for Rewa Dairy to import milk powder from abroad and convert them locally into liquid milk.

So through aid from New Zealand and other initiatives, Government is helping Fiji's Cooperative Dairy Company Limited in investing more money into the marketing of the company. This is not normal fiscal practice, and I wonder why this Government reacts to expedite funds to owners of Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited.

Madam Speaker, once again, the answer to our raw milk production is modernising the industry and throwing more money directly into the farms, and not into this company that has enrolled and already enjoys the spoils of increased tariff and preferential prices.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER. – Hear, hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA. –Madam Speaker, finally the Government is willing to compensate district advisory councils for their work in communities.

All in all, Madam Speaker, as millions are allocated to fund new projects and administrative costs of the Ministry and corporate services, I wonder if the Ministry's ambition of improving access to basic services and infrastructure has been compromised.

Madam Speaker, many rural areas have poor roads utility and transport to markets and social services all these incentives, to follow anything other than subsistence lifestyle.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's rural areas have great potential to contribute to economic growth in areas of tourism, agriculture, forest and fisheries. The challenge is for Government to provide the basic infrastructure and markets to grow these potentials.

Madam Speaker, every person in Fiji has the right to a decent and affordable housing opportunity. Section 35(1) of the Constitution says, and I quote:

“The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to accessible and adequate housing and sanitation.”

Madam Speaker, the millions of dollars misused in many SEGs of this Budget could instead go into provisions of affordable, durable and cyclone-resistant houses in families in our rural and maritime areas. Maybe, a review of the Housing Authority and Public Rental Board is a good start. These investigations must include the Waila Scheme and the Raiwai Apartments.

Madam Speaker, I challenge the Ministry to set a target of 1,000 homes per year for low and middle income earners in rural communities, and ask that Government look into facilitating a grant for first time home-owners and young families. It is time we give our young parents a level playing field, and not a ticket to poverty.

Madam Speaker, about 15,000 families or approximately 70,000 people live in informal settlements or on land without title. These areas usually lack amenities, such as water, electricity, roads and sewerage system. Once again, the Ministry is misguided in this area. The Government is evicting families and not focussing on entering consultations with squatter communities, landowners and NGOs that work with these communities. I suggest that it is high time, we relocate squatters to properly registered subdivisions. The cost of these must be met by Government, land and buildings can be leased to squatters with an option to purchase lots, and also ensure that FNPF credits are used for part of this purchase price.

Madam Speaker, I stand here today to thank those landowners who have opened up their traditional lands to house families. I also thank landowners, who do not want to evict families who live on their land illegally. Government needs to look into these informal settlements, relocate families to better facilities, look into land deals with landowners, and in special cases, compensate landowners for their generosity.

Madam, Speaker, the time has come for a review of the maritime Act and the Fiji Maritime Safety Authority. Our ports, Madam Speaker, are strategic assets and ownership should be retained by Fiji.

Madam Speaker, instead of selling off these valuable State assets, Government should pump money into improving service and providing better standards for inter-island shipping, including enforcement of safety regulations.

Madam Speaker, on the note of expanding services to the rural communities, I ask that Kubulau Government Station, that is earmarked to house the Office of the Assistant District Officer and DAS of Ministry of Agriculture, also house other Ministries and services. For your information, the proposed new Kubulau Government Station will only house two offices, one for the Assistant District Officer and the other for the Agricultural Officer. Also, Kubulau is easily accessible to Savusavu than to Nabouwalu in Bua, despite the fact that the district is in Bua. Having said that, only two officers will be accessible to the 10 villages of Kubulau in Kubulau.

For other issues, the poor people of Kubulau will still have to move across to Savusavu, sleep there and come back when things are met according to their wishes in terms of services.

Once again, I make a plea to Government that the people of Bua have accepted the Government's plan to make Nabouwalu a township. Honourable Minister, it is ten years now that we have submitted our intentions. The nine *tikinas* in Bua have already submitted our intentions to purchase each lot for the nine *tikinas* and may I request Government that in accordance with its \$10 million, Nabouwalu be granted and also Bua be looked into in terms of purchasing lots for the nine *tikinas* in the province of Bua.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Support the Budget!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, as former Divisional Commissioner, Shadow Minister for agriculture Rural and Maritime Development and a resident for three years in Lomanikoro, Bua, Vanua Levu is fully covered in this Budget and in instances where Government could not show leadership in its “Look North Policy”, they have taken funds and invested them in agencies or bodies that are not based in Vanua Levu.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to touch on *iTaukei* issues - the *ilaukei* Lands and Fisheries Commission.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Oh, no.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, there are only two important issues handled in this office. They are: maintenance and preservation of Native Lands and Fisheries Commission’s records. That is the most important one, to ensure that it is well preserved. It has been done and continued to-date. My point, Madam Speaker, is that, it has been allocated \$32,000 to look into the maintenance and preservation of all *iTaukei* land and Fisheries Commission records.

What I want to say, Madam Speaker, is that the location where these documents are kept is sensitive to hazards. May I suggest to the Government to please move the *iTaukei* Land and Fisheries Commission to a higher ground. We had recommended ten years ago to move to Borron House because of the safe keep of *iTaukei* Land and Fisheries Commission records.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- *Vinaka*.

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- The records are vulnerable. Despite the allocation of maintaining these records, it is vulnerable, so may I pledge to the Government, move this office to a higher ground and if to another place, we are of the view that the best place would be Borron House.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for your indulgence. *Vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the Budget for 2015. I have to join my colleagues on this side of the Chamber by stating that the “Turning Promises into Deeds,” I beg to differ, given the outcome of this debate so far, hence, it should be renamed ‘Turning Promises into Debts’.

In honourable Professor Prasad’s reply, he stated that the differences in maturity, skill and professionalism speak volumes, as to the amateurism of the authors of the 2015 Budget.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I will now extend the borders, which is actually interlinking the Budget of our nation and has some repercussions over our MSG countries, and I would also like to mention the problems that will arise because of political engagements that we have here in our country.

Madam Speaker, the impact that trade will have on indigenous communities in MSG Member States and in Fiji, given that a very small percentage of indigenous businessmen are involved, will be severed. Each MSG member country has its own problems with respect to indigenous people's active participation in their own country's commercial activity. The general agreement among the MSG members is the promotion of indigenous communities so that they can become active and successful competitors in their economic sectors. Each country has initiatives to help their people bridge the economic gap, to give effect to this policy. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, there is not a single mention or allocation in the 2015 Budget by this Government that specifically relates to any induction programme to assist our indigenous people, to help elevate them to become active participants along with all other communities in our various economic sectors.

Madam Speaker, almost all the shops in our cities and towns throughout the country are owned mainly by our Indo-Fijian friends, although the Chinese are slowly, but surely taking over from them. The Government, especially the *iTaukei* Members, have not made any recommendations on this 2015 Budget that might help elevate indigenous people to a level where they can be equal participants in our economic sectors. The concentration in this Budget seems to be through freebies. This, Madam Speaker, is also demeaning as it removes any motivation of individuals to grow and become self-reliant, and active productive members of our society.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- It is called the 'leg-up'.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, the sad thing about it all is that this treatment of our indigenous Fijians here in Fiji has found its way to Papua New Guinea, as well as in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, as well as the observer nations of MSG of New Caledonia and East Timor. I suggest to our friends in the MSG to wake up and take note that the fallout from our *coup* culture has reached their shores, and they need to wake up now and take action, or else

HON. LT COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- You were there in 1987!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- ... to determine your own destiny will be lost. I changed! I had only been involved in one *coup*, you continued right through!

(Laughter!)

HON. CDR .T. KOROILAVESAU.- You were there in 2000 with me!

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! You are taking minutes out of the speaker's time.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, for our indigenous people here in Fiji, most of our institutions have either been removed or are now controlled by Government, except the *vanua*, and that part of our people they will never control. Although after eight years in power, its refusal to ratify the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People sends a clear signal to our *iTaukei* community that further erosion of our internationally recognised rights as an indigenous people can be expected.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- *Vinaka! Vinaka!*

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I believe, Madam Speaker, that only when the indigenous people here in Fiji, and our brothers and sisters of the MSG countries understand fully the 47 Articles of UNDRIP and relate it to the 2015 Budget, they will they realise that a hidden agenda in this Budget is

trying to alienate indigenous Fijian people from the ownership of their resources and the opportunity to become equal participants in the economic development of our Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I say that if the MSG countries are not vigilant now or alert to the changing attitude towards indigenous peoples in our region, they will be taken by surprise as we were, and they will regret it for the rest of their lives.

The 2015 Budget announcement by the honourable Minister of Finance confirms only the sale of our native land to the ever-increasing influx of Chinese migrants. A 99 year lease of native land is as good as filled, although, Madam Speaker, the introduction by the Government through their withdrawal Bill on freehold land has already put its future value in doubt.

Madam Speaker, not all *iTaukei* have land here in Viti Levu, likewise in Vanua Levu, especially those from Lau, Lomaiviti, Kadavu, Yasawa, and those of us who live down the mangrove. Madam Speaker, if one takes all the villages in Rewa and Tailevu South, and you divide our land area that we own equally amongst our total population, each individual *iTaukei* would receive less than one or two square land. People in the Rewa Delta live amongst crabs and *mana*, while the rich business, government leaders, and people from all over reside in the comfort of the Rewan land called Suva.

(Laughter)

The iTLTB should be more pro-active. It could establish a facility to assist the natives. It could establish a facility to assist the native *iTaukei* to buy land both for residential and commercial purposes, instead of just selling land to foreigners and locals alike. Madam Speaker, iTLTB should be provided with funding by Government to take on this responsibility, to assist all our people, all Fiji citizens first, not FijiFirst.

(Laughter)

The Constitution of Fiji First is very clear. It is totally controlled by only a few who decide who is to be first.

(Laughter)

We, on this side of the Parliament, know they have absolutely no say, and almost all of them are fearful of losing their seats, if they dare to speak their hearts on these issues. We feel sorry for them. What we need, Madam Speaker, is for all our people to be put first, then and only then will the 2015 Budget be people-friendly.

Madam Speaker, I cannot help but wonder why the Government did not make the necessary changes to the structures of the iTLTB so that it also performs the same functions as the Land Bank. They had the ability to amend Decrees, make whatever structural changes they needed to allow it to also remove the poundage deducted from native leases and redirect leases to increase the landowners income. They could have provided adequate funding to enable lease as well, as having its own Survey Unit.

Why not? I ask why? Has another land leasing body being created to deal with the same resource? Is the ultimate plan to apply a sunset clause on the existence of iTLTB? Again, I have to emphasise, is the ultimate plan to apply sunset clause on the existence of iTLTB? The Land Bank is a duplicate operation that will eventually split the loyalties of landowners based on financial benefits. I

strongly recommend that we reform and create a one-stop vibrant iTLTB, which will service to the landowners, and all stakeholders alike, and any funding needed to allow the iTLTB to deliver on these requirements, which includes absorbing the Land Bank as a Division with iTLTB be taken from the Military budget, in particular the outstanding services, amounting to ultimately \$72 million. Unless Government considers this seriously and uses the iTLTB, the landowners in Fiji will need to start rethinking about their priorities with regards to their land, its safekeeping, and its management and the future involvement of Government in it.

Madam Speaker, I speak to you as a Fijian of this era, and a Fijian who had seen colonisation, independence and a variety of *coups* in spite governments over the past 44 years. Why are we seen as racists when we promote efforts to elevate indigenous people, to enter the mainstream economic environment and hopefully become seasoned business people. A total of 144 countries of the world, including China and India support the rights of indigenous people, yet the government of these islands, with a majority of indigenous population, has refused to support it. Why?

People of Fiji, as Shakespeare said, “Lend me your ears”.

(Laughter)

This Government, has for eight years borrowed heavily. In 2006, the amount of our debt was \$130.7 million and today it stands at \$279.5 million, which is an increase of \$148.8 million or 113.8 per cent. The cost of our borrowings over the past eight years was \$1.8 billion, and if we add the 2015 Estimates, then the cost of our borrowings over nine years rises to \$2.1 billion, and that is just interest on our borrowings. What is of concern is that we are also borrowing to fund our operational costs, not just the capital projects.

(Chorus of Interjections)

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Listen! Listen! When you ask a company abroad to come and work here, operational cost is part of it. And we all selling the state assets come 2015, bearing in mind these same assets were listed for sale in 2014, to prop its income as well. We should adopt a more conservative approach, given our vulnerabilities. The bottom line, Madam Speaker, is that we will be repaying these debts for at least the next two generations to come.

The \$1.3 billion allocation for capital projects is significant and the allocation of our roads are a major part of that budget. While I do not deny the need to upgrade and complete new roads, a longer term plan which will allow more funds to be diverted to other key needs would have been preferable. Especially as Government has already spent \$2.1 billion between 2012 and 2014, the \$1.3 billion allocated for 2015 will take \$3.4 billion out to total capital expenditure, now that we have a new Parliament people want to exercise their freedom of information rights and know how these funds are being spent. Who got the contracts? How did they get the contracts?

Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji, you are bought through freebies and little do you know that each individual citizen of this country will pay an average of almost \$4,400 per person, per year and this amount will continue to go through your lifetime, through two generation of families and grandchildren in the future.

The Military is extremely oversized, why? Do we have a credible external threat that the people should be aware, or are people of Fiji themselves the perceived threat. As far as I am concerned, the only threat that Fiji faces is from our Military (not during our time).

The Budget Estimates states that Royal Fiji Military Force (RFMF) is responsible for upholding and defending the Fijian Constitution, but this is not the People's Constitution. It belongs to the few who wrote and promoted it, and they have allocated a total of \$103 million to protect the few, under the guise of protecting this nation. Do not forget I am also a former Fiji and United Nations Colonel and very familiar with your intent, and I pray that our people wake up before it is too late.

Our people are the ones paying for the Military, not to protect them but to be guidance of their welfare, unfortunately Madam Speaker, the political ideology that our country has, as set out by this Government show that we have not moved an inch towards true democracy, instead we now have what I call a "parliamentary dictatorship."

I think we are getting a bit of strength on that as we mix after our morning tea. I hope it will grow better.

Madam Speaker, I support the role of our troops are playing in troubled spots around the world. We have a well-known reputation of being good peacekeepers and when we can afford to lend sport to ensure peace in the world, we must surely do so. The problem, Madam Speaker, is that the cost our country has incurred in providing for the UN, for example have not been fully refunded to Fiji. Approximately \$72 million remains unpaid from the UN for our peacekeeping for 2014. In the 2015 Budget Estimates, this Government has introduced a new Head 49, covering peacekeeping and an allocation of an additional \$72 million to cover this cost.

Madam Speaker, until this new Head was introduced in the 2014 Budget Estimate, all these costs was a Military budget under Head 19. The average general cost of peacekeeping in Sinai and Iraq was \$26.3 million per annum. This new Head for peacekeeping is costing the taxpayers an additional \$45.2 million per annum.

Madam Speaker, the Military has a role. Its role is to serve and defend the citizens of this country but it has traded that role. Regretfully, the Military has not returned to that role, but has instead imposed itself on our civilian population and militarised this government. May I remind my military colleagues on the other side this is not what our comrades before us, who made the ultimate sacrifice, would necessarily be proud off. The challenge for all of us who were once proud members of the RFMF is to do what we must to remove all elements of the military from direct involvement in the governance of our country, and to ensure it returns to its core role as the last bastion of defence for the people from any external threat and leave the internal security of our people to the Police. If any officers or personnel wants to get involved in the political or government apparatus, then they should resign from the commission, as we all did take those chances like everyone else. That is what an officer and a gentleman would do.

Thank you, Madam for allowing me to participate.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I rise as Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and also as Leader of Government in Parliament to speak in support of the 2015 Budget.

I commend the honourable Minister of Finance and his team for providing the nation with a blueprint for our development next year that meets two principal objectives. It builds on the Bainimarama-Government's reforms of the past eight years and it opens up new areas of spending to continue our task of addressing the needs of the Fijian people. It is comprehensive, imaginative and responsible. And it is a Budget for our times – an era of great hope and opportunity. However, Madam Speaker, before I proceed to make further comments on the Budget as announced by the honourable

Minister of Finance, I would like to reassure and reaffirm our people, the people of our beloved nation that in the words of our Prime Minister, “We are a Government for the People of Fiji.”

HON GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka!*

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- In particular, I want to reassure my tauvus from Vanua Levu, in particular the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu the Tui Cakau, honourable Nawaikula from Buca, the honourable Tagivetaua from Bua and also the honourable members from Vanua Levu on this side of the Chamber that your interests are in the very heart of this Government, as is the interest of every other citizen of Fiji. And to demonstrate this commitment, I want to say that FijiFirst did not get majority support from Keiyasi in Navosa, however it is where we will build the next new hospital in Fiji next year. Also by the same token , FijiFirst scored minimal votes in the *vanua* of Naitodua, but I want to assure the people and the villages of Dromuna and Vatani in Kaba that this FijiFirst Government and the influence of a number of citizens from Northland on this side of the Chamber and not the honourable Ratu Tikoca, that we will be building a road to your beautiful peninsula as promised by the honourable Prime Minister for next year.

Madam Speaker, we are capitalising on Fiji’s strong economic performance and our growth rate over four per cent to continue, to invest in our national infrastructure and the intellectual capital of our people. Whether it is expanding our free schooling programme, providing more communities with basic services such as electricity and water or continuing to upgrade our roads network and our ports and airports, these are all investments into our future.

We are building a stronger economy. We are giving our people what they need to improve their lives and their families, and how fortunate we are that this Government is in the driving seat because the alternative laid before the nation, the honourable Members on the other side this week demonstrates once and for all the wisdom of the Fijian people in choosing FijiFirst over the other parties.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – Madam Speaker, in my maiden speech, I expressed disappointment that having had eight years to think about where they might take the country themselves, those honourable Members on the opposite side had come here with no fresh ideas again. Listening to their responses to the Budget, I had the same sinking feeling as I had at the beginning because instead of a plausible alternatives, all I heard all week were a series of contradictions. They do not have a viable, alternative blueprint to take Fiji forward. Some of them do not seem to know the difference between a Government ministry and a statutory authority. So the feeling on our side of Parliament this week is again one of overwhelming disappointment that we do not have an opposition that is worthy of the title to keep us on our toes.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – The honourable Prime Minister spoke before the last Elections of waging a battle of ideas to decide the future of Fiji. This assumed that the Opposition had some ideas in the first place, but the honourable Members on the opposite side have shown once again that they have nothing in their arsenal.

(Laughter)

Nothing valuable to contribute to our nation's development, nothing cogent or sensible to take us forward.

It was bad enough having to sit through the claim by the honourable Leader of the National Federation Party that this Government has increased the gap between the rich and poor in Fiji. What utter nonsense. The truth is that we have done more than any other government to close that gap and

...

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – ... to give the low-income Fijians the leg-up they need, whether it is free schooling, free access to medicine, subsidise electricity, water and even free milk in our primary schools.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – Listen, listen!

None of this was provided by previous governments. So the real gap here is a credibility gap on the part of the honourable Members and a crowd of redundant around him.

(Laughter)

But what was really astonishing, Madam Speaker, was the honourable Member claiming that the Budget was, and I quote “economically boring”. I am sorry you were bored Mr. Expert, unfortunately you are not here. But this Budget was not formulated for your entertainment or so you could give it your academic tick. It was formulated so that the Bainimarama-Government can continue its programme of service delivery to the Fijian people.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – It is why they put us over here and you on your chair.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, let me say, what is really boring for those of us on this side of the Chamber, to be lectured by someone who went to the nation at the last Elections wanting to cut VAT to zero without ever giving a rational explanation as to how he intended to make up the \$300 million shortfall. Someone who misused his position as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to grandstand and score cheap political points. Someone who has to apologise to you, Madam Speaker, for impugning your integrity outside the Parliament. Someone who finds our economic programme boring.

HON. ROKO. T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO. – Madam Speaker, I rise on the point of order. I think you ruled on this one already - imputing improper motives to other Members is one of those things that is prohibited in speeches.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you. The issue has been raised, I had addressed it as well. Please refrain from addressing the Member directly.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – Madam Speaker, I was only trying to make a statement of fact but, I will take your guidance on this matter.

Madam Speaker, there are many things that can be said about this Budget, but boring is not one of them. It is the opposite of boring. It is, in fact, exciting because it holds so much promise to improve the state of our nation and the prospects of our people.

In my own Ministry, lots of exciting prospects are in store, as we upgrade the capacity of the Fiji Roads Authority, Department of Works, Water Authority of Fiji, Department of Meteorology, Department of Transport Planning, Land Transport Authority, Government Shipping Services, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji and the Department of Energy.

Before I go into any detail, I want to say something about the Government's overall management of these vital components of our economy Madam Speaker, including the infrastructure on which all Fijian people depend.

It is a fact that water, power, and roads make no distinctions about race, colour, or creed, neither about men, women or children. All the people benefit from them. Better water supply is the wish of all mothers, better roads is the wish of all parents who want security for their children travelling to and from school. Electrification is the dream of all rural dwellers who do not quite enjoy the benefits of this service.

Madam Speaker, in that light, I happen to be the “billion dollar man” with overall responsibility for eight departments and four commercial statutory authorities, with a combined annual spend of \$1.1 billion. That is a third of our national budget, tasked with the massive responsibility to deliver these services to all Fijians. I promise you, Madam Speaker, and the rest of this Chamber, we will deliver.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – Questions have been raised by certain honourable Members on the opposite side about my/our ability to handle all these responsibilities. But let me explain something. For the past two years, I have come within my allocated budget of many hundreds of millions of dollars while delivering the biggest rollout of basic services in the nation's history.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER. – *Vinaka, vinaka!*

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. – More importantly, I am part of a Government that knows precisely what it is doing. We do not just pluck figures out of thin air. We have a plan. We have built capacity where none existed. We have people on this side of Parliament who not only deliver but have a vision of where we want to take this nation.

Madam Speaker, it is our defining characteristic that separates us from those sitting opposite us. and all around us is evidence of our ability to make a difference. Just take a stroll outside and look at Victoria Parade. Before we came along, Suva was going backwards. Now, we have a capital we can all be proud of. Also, take a drive to Nadi or to Rakiraki. Our roads have not been in a better state for 40 years, and we are continuing to make the necessary investment to improve our infrastructure because it is the key to economic growth and progress, Madam Speaker.

Those opposite us may think that is boring. No we do not. We deliver. We serve. We intend to honour our commitment to the Fijian people to keep going to next year and beyond.

Madam Speaker, I would like to go very quickly to a snapshot of some of our plans for 2015. There is an old Chinese saying, I quote: "To get rich, you must build roads." They are the arteries on which any nation thrives and if they are not in proper condition, its economic health suffers. The Bainimarama-Government has ended decades of neglect of our roads with the biggest investment ever made in Fiji's infrastructure. All over the country, our arteries are either being repaired or new ones created, but there is still much to be done.

In 2015, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) has been granted a total of \$653 million to address the backlog in the maintenance of our roads, including bridges and jetties. This includes a provision of \$155 million for the Nadi-Suva Road Upgrade Programme. Already, the journey along our busiest highway has been vastly improved and those improvements will continue.

Madam Speaker, last year, we began transforming the lives of people living in the Sigatoka Valley by sealing the first 15 kilometres of the Valley Road, and that work will also continue. For Fijians living in the North, two major projects received allocations of \$78 million for the completion of the Nabouwalu to Dreketi Highway, and \$13 million for the Buca Bay or Hibiscus Highway. We expect economic activities in the North to double over time because of this investment - more tourism, more market access for agriculture and more general economic activities.

Madam Speaker, then there is the upgrading of our vehicle and passenger gateway to the North - the Natovi Jetty in Northland Tailevu, plus further work on the jetties in Nabouwalu and Savusavu to complement our road upgrades in Vanua Levu. Here in Suva, the reconstruction of the critically important Stinson and Vatuwaqa Bridges will commence in 2015, with an allocation of \$3 million, supported by a supplementary grant from the Chinese Government, amounting to \$15 million. In the West, we are finally building a new bridge into Denarau, our most important tourism destination.

Certain honourable Members on the other side have a problem with us hiring foreign contractors to undertake our road upgrades, but we make no apology for doing so, Madam Speaker. We need to end the corruption in the old PWD and the loss of basic road-building skills in Fiji. These are gradually being restored, and responsibility for our roads will eventually revert fully to local firms. But until we can make world-class roads ourselves, we need overseas experts and contractors. The Bainimarama-Government does not believe in localisation for its own sake, Madam Speaker, We want the best, whether it is in infrastructure or any other sector, and the Fijian people deserve the best.

Madam Speaker, the same level of commitment to roads is being applied to water, the most basic of human needs. In 2015, \$239 million has been allocated by the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), to continue addressing the years of neglect of our water and sewerage infrastructure. I am making it a personal priority to push through the projects that need urgent attention, whether it is the \$4 million allocated next year to provide water to those living in the Delainavesi-Veisari corridor (and I am pleased to say that that work has already begun) or the \$23 million to relieve the stench from the Kinoya Waste Treatment Plant.

HON. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka.*

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- For 2015, \$17 million has been allocated to upgrade the Vaturu Dam and Sabeto Dam, to support the increased demand for water in the Nadi-Lautoka

corridor, and to commence an engineering study to harvest water from the Rewa River to improve the flow to the Nausori-Suva corridor and the Tailevu South and Northland Tailevu.

We are making an unprecedented investment in waste water management, including an assessment of all major water and waste pipes in the Suva-Nausori corridor, Nadi, Lautoka, Sigatoka and Labasa. Madam Speaker, \$2 million is allocated next year to find faults and leakages, and \$22 million to fix them. I mentioned that we want to make the Kinoya Sewerage Treatment Plant fragrant again, but this work on sewerage infrastructure will also be extended to Navakai in Nadi and Natabua in Lautoka.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, we also continue our programme to improve the transport sector, another vital component of our economy at around six per cent of GDP. This includes a major reform of the Land Transport Authority (LTA), which receives a budget allocation of \$3.3 million.

I am going to be very frank about the LTA. There is widespread perception of corruption about this organisation and unfortunately, much of it is true. However, we are doing something about it, just as we are insisting on the LTA, generally lifting its game. What I want as Minister responsible for the LTA, is for them to do an honest day's work, and to those in the organisation who are corrupt, who take bribes from ordinary Fijians, you better believe it, I am coming for you.

I also have a message for road users who exceed weight limits and damage our roads or belch exhaust fumes in to the air, we are also coming for you with the help of the Police, and \$197,000 has been allocated for new equipment to monitor vehicle emissions.

Madam Speaker, as a maritime country, we have a special obligation to Fijians living in maritime areas, and the Bainimarama-Government's commitment to them continues in 2015. For the past four years, we have been upgrading the fleet of the Government Shipping Services. Four new vessels are already operating – the *Rogovoka II*, Tug *Dre Donu*, *Sigavou* and *Vunilagi*, and next year, \$3 million has been allocated to complete the construction of a fifth vessel. These new vessels are transforming the lives of ordinary people in our maritime communities, making their journey faster and more reliable, as well as enabling them to transport heavy equipment and market produce. In 2015, we are providing \$1.2 million in backup services for the Government Shipping Services, a new office space, workshops and a cargo holding building.

Madam Speaker, time does not permit me to dwell on all aspects of the Budget allocations of my eight Departments and four statutory authorities, but let me take a broad brush to the rest. It simply means more lighthouses, more Maritime and Safety Authority officers, more counter illegal fishing and protect Fiji's borders, the creation of a Land Transport Policy and Maritime Transport Policy, technology and infrastructure upgrades to the Fiji Meteorological Services, and the list goes on and on.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I work on the basis that all of the Departments and Statutory Authorities I supervise cannot operate in isolation. They must achieve a high degree of efficiency individually, but they must also work together in a holistic fashion with a degree of teamwork.

Madam Speaker, that is the ethos that we also bring into Government as a whole. It is the sum total of our efforts that really matter, all sections of Government working in unison and in partnership with the private sector for the greater good of our beloved nation. That is also the ethos on which this Budget is based, all of our national priorities for next year brought together in a spending programme that is responsible, prudent and will improve the lives of every Fijian.

Madam Speaker, I thank you, and I commend the 2015 Budget to this Parliament.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, I rise to add my voice in support of the motion before Parliament and to congratulate the honourable Minister of Finance and his staff for a comprehensive and pragmatic Budget. To the youths listening from the comfort of their homes, the Budget reaffirms Government's commitment that young people are our future and most precious asset. Nothing is more important to the national agenda than to nurture them, keep them healthy in body, mind and spirit and equip them with skills they need to have fulfilling lives and contribute fully to the development of our economy.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is responsible for the formulation and implementation of a range of policies and programmes, targeted at empowering our young people and enabling them to reach their full potential.

My Ministry's Youth Development Programmes are all aimed at equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to enable them to stand on their own feet and develop income-earning opportunities that are viable, sustainable and satisfying.

The Ministry also encourages teamwork, which is a central component in facilitating the promotion and development of sports. The integration of these two sectors – youth and sports development is an integral part of the Government's Strategic Plan.

Government has allocated a budget of \$16.7 million to the Ministry for youth development and sports programmes for 2015. Overall, this represents an increase of \$6.3 million over the 2014 level. The major component of this increase is to enable youth sporting teams to compete in a number of major overseas events in 2015.

Policy and Administration: Madam Speaker, to strengthen our ability to meet the needs of young people, and especially those who are vulnerable, the Ministry is undertaking a number of reforms at our Youth Training Centres throughout Fiji in the coming year. The Ministry is enhancing basic infrastructure, its human resource needs plus the training programmes that are equipping young people with the skills to obtain employment. The Policy and Administration Section is resourced with a total budget of \$2.8 million in 2015.

As part of Government's commitment, a budget of \$852,000 is allocated for the upgrading of the five main youth training centers, namely the Nasau Youth Training Centre in Sigatoka, Yavitu Training Centre in Kadavu, Naleba Training Centre in Macuata, Naqere Training Centre in Savusavu, and the National Youth Band Centre in Valelevu. These centres provide skills training that will help young people in their future.

A new allocation of \$50,000 is for the refurbishment of the Ministry's offices, and Institutional Strengthening to improve service delivery to the public.

Youth Development and Training: Madam Speaker, my Ministry's Youth Development and Training Section is integral to delivering programmes for youths in Fiji. With a total budget of \$2.5 million, that supports the implementation of the National Youth Policy, Government will continue its support for the Ministry's Capacity Building Programmes to meet the current needs on the ground and ensure that young people become productive members of society. Government has increased the funding of the Youth Capacity Building Programme to \$700,000, to strengthen

its Seeds of Success, Empowerment Training, Youth Feed the Nations and Multi Skills/Mobile Skills training programmes.

Madam Speaker, to name a few of the current successful youth clubs performance, who have undergone our Seeds of Success, Empowerment Training, Youth Feed the Nations and Multi Skills/Mobile Skills training:

- (a) Makolei Youth Club in Nabouwalu, Bua;
- (b) Trinity/Nukucula Youth Club in Labasa, Macuata;
- (c) Tobulevu Youth Club in Tawake, Cakaudrove;
- (d) Vatunareba Youth Club in Nalobi, Yasawa;
- (e) Tokoni Youth Club in Navatusila, Nadroga/Navosa;
- (f) Delaira Youth Club in Saivou, Ra;
- (g) Legalega Youth Club in Nadi, Ba;
- (h) Natokowaqa PRD Youth Club in Lautoka, Ba;
- (i) Natumua Village Youth Group in Natumua, Kadavu;
- (j) Yaro Youth Club in Batiki, Lomaiviti;
- (k) Nasautoka Youth Club in Wainibuka, Tailevu;
- (l) Naseni Youth Club in Verata, Tailevu;
- (m) Lodon Youth Group in Sawakasa, Tailevu;
- (n) Naibita Youth Group in Wainibuka, Tailevu;
- (o) Faith Based Youth Group in Navua, Namosi;
- (p) Raiwaqa Bolatagane Youth Club in Raiwaqa, Namosi;
- (q) Naboutini Youth Group in Serua, Serua;
- (r) Nakida Youth Club in Nagonenicolo, Naitasiri; and
- (s) Waivou Village Youth Club in Waivou, Rewa.

Madam Speaker, some of successful youth clubs mentioned have the potential to be self-sufficient in the near future and the Ministry of Youth and Sports will continue to work in partnership, so that they can reach that level.

Madam Speaker I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Korea, through its International Youth Fellowship (IYF), from Thursday, 27th December to Sunday, 30th December, it conducted IT training; mind and heart communication; discipline through taekwondo moves and free medical checkup for our youths at the National Gymnasium. The Ministry brought in 417 youth leaders and representatives of the youth clubs from all the four divisions including the peri-urban and urban youth clubs. They were accommodated, with meals for four days, and transported to and from the National Gymnasium and back to their homes. Feedbacks from the youth members during the *talanoa* session which were conducted with my staff after the end of every programme for four days were surprising. They were misinformed by the “agents of fear” during the Elections Campaign, but they were content and satisfied from the sessions we conducted, which they have seen through the services already provided by the Ministry, and that will be provided again through the 2015 Budget.

Madam Speaker, Government, in partnership with Non-Government Youth Organisations has increased its allocation for the Voluntary Organisation Youth Training Programme to \$200,000, to further encourage young people to serve the larger community. In 2015, Government will use this allocation specially to fund entrepreneurial activities among young people.

Madam Speaker, this year, my Ministry sponsored the Best Youth Entrepreneur Exporter of the Year 2014. These are initiatives by the Ministry to encourage youth engagement in the business sector.

Research, Policy, Information and Planning: Madam Speaker, a total of \$190,000 is allocated under the Research, Policy, Planning and Information Unit to improve efficiency and the effective delivery of the Ministry's policies. The Unit will be better able to help set Ministry priorities by providing managerial information that is up-to-date and more thoroughly analyzed for planning and decision-making purposes. The Unit will ensure that it focuses on enhancing and expanding the Ministry's service delivery.

Madam Speaker, this includes the review of the *Youth Development Index Report for Fiji*, strengthening monitoring and evaluation of the Ministry's policies and programmes, reviewing and updating of the management information system, strengthening partnerships with youth groups Government agencies, and Non-Government Organisations and reviewing the Ministry's Training Centre programmes.

Sports: Madam Speaker, a love of sport is a defining aspect of the Fijian character. It is central to the national psyche. It keeps our people fit, develops agility and tactical skills, builds teamwork, creates a sense of loyalty and belonging, the will to win, and it is an integral part of nation building.

The Ministry plays a key role in developing sporting infrastructure, both in urban and rural areas. It is also charged with creating a vibrant and highly competitive sports industry in Fiji to engender national pride and benefit the Fijian economy.

My Ministry will continue its programmes to develop and upgrade rural playing fields. This programme has been successful, not only in providing rural people with better facilities, but enhancing the development of players and identifying those with the talent to compete at a national level and represent Fiji in international competition. The Ministry works closely with the Fiji National Sports Commission to implement sports policies. It will also oversee the maintenance of the Government Sports Facilities operated by the Fiji Sports Council.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is also charged with implementing the National Sports Policy that emanates from Government's Strategic Plan for sports development in Fiji. A budget of \$11.2 million is allocated in 2015 for this activity. We work closely with the Fiji National Sports Commission and will continue to fund the Commission's operation with a grant of \$800,000.

Madam Speaker, in 2010, our honourable Prime Minister signed and ratified the UNESCO International Convention Against Doping in Sports. A National Anti-Doping Organisation (NADO) will be established under the Sports Commission and will be responsible for developing anti-doping educational and awareness activities and programmes nationwide.

The Ministry has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health creating the Healthy Island Through Sports (HITS) initiative, which encourages participation in sport and other physical activities across all segments of Fiji's population as a way to improve the nation's health.

Government has allocated \$2 million, to be administered by the Sports Commission, to work with other sporting agencies and coordinate Fiji's participation in major international sporting

tournaments to be held in 2015. These include the Oceania Football Tournaments, the Commonwealth Youth Games, the World Netball Championship, the Rugby World Cup, the Junior Rugby World Cup, the Pacific Rugby Cup, the Pacific Games, the Pacific Nations Cup and the under 20 FIFA World Cup.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry has assumed the responsibility for the development of rural playing fields and complexes from the Office of the Prime Minister. In 2015, Government has provided \$1.6 million to continue with work on the rural sporting complex in Kadavu and Gau, as part of its long-term programme to develop top level sporting facilities in rural areas.

My Ministry will also have an allocation of \$200,000 to continue its work on facilitating the development of other rural playing fields. This is to provide more opportunities to rural sporting talents, to develop and to encourage more young people in rural areas to participate in sports and other kinds of organized physical activity.

Government has also allocated \$3 million for the upgrade and maintenance of the Government-owned sports facilities across Fiji. The Fiji Sports Council will prioritise its projects based on which facility would need urgent work. The Chinese Government Grant and Memorandum of Undertaking (MOU) was signed two weeks ago on the Vunidawa Sports Complex, which will start in 2015.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will continue to do more with what is available and maximising the available resources. It will centralise control with robust monitoring and will integrate with other departments to work in partnership with youth members for the betterment of our youths.

Madam Speaker, I therefore support the motion before the Chamber to approve the 2015 Appropriation Bill.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I rise to express my support for this momentous 2015 Budget. The first budget that this country has ever had as a true democracy, a democracy in which every person in this country, in accordance with Gods will, has been treated as an equal human being for the very first time ever.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is not a weak and impotent Budget. It is visionary, it shows true leadership, true courage and real consistency. There have been some terms used by the other side to describe this Budget, “ambitious, not for the poor, boring.” Let me deal with each of these terms one by one, ambitious – yes, it is ambitious because this is an ambitious Government. We have set high targets, we want to build a better Fiji, a sustainable democracy, a growing economy. We aim for the stars, because if we miss, we might land on the sun.

(Laughter)

If we just aimed for the mountains and we miss, we might just end up on the side of the mountain or at the bottom of the mountain. We have imagination in this government and imagination is a powerful thing. But we are not just dreamers. No, we are here to back it up with action, with execution, with strategy and with results.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, many of the honourable Members in this Chamber have been speaking in parables and story, so I thought I will join them. A good Iranian friend of mine whom I met a few years ago told me about different kinds of people. The first kind of person walks up to the door, tries it and finds that it is locked, he turns around and walks away. The second kind of person walks up to the door, finds that it is locked, asks around for the key and when no one has a key, he then walks away. The third kind of person walks up to the door, he tries it, finds that it is locked, asks around for the key and when no one has the key, he makes a key. That is what describes this Government.

That is what this Government is about, we are key makers. We are not satisfied with the door being locked, and the key not being available, but we will make the key. The Bainimarama-Government that preceded this FijiFirst Government always found that the door was locked and things that prevented our progress in the past and we have always made keys to make sure that that door was opened.

Over the past few years, we have realised that if we keep doing what we have always been doing, we will always get the result that we have always had. So, if you want a new result, you have to do something new and that has been the hallmark of this Government these past few years.

We have seen policies put in place that have led to growth. Reduced personal income taxation to increase discretionary income, to increase spending, demand and consumption, reduce corporate taxation to encourage companies to come and invest, and enhance infrastructure development at an unparalleled level never ever before seen in this country. And on top of this, a new Constitution that provides new socio economic rights, a real revolution for this country.

What happened as a result of this. Let me tell you what happened. Growth levels in 2013 at 4.6 per cent, growth forecast in 2014 at 4.2 per cent, and growth forecast for next year at around four per cent. Three years of growth above four per cent forecast, unprecedented in the annals of Fiji's history.

Madam Speaker, there have been statements to say that this Budget is not for the poor. Let me address that issue. I think that if someone says that this Budget is not made for the poor, it reflects a poor understanding of the Budget.

Here is the thing, let me say this slowly in case you do not get it. The measures that Government plans to address the poor are not only found in the budget of Social Welfare, it is found in the budget as a whole.

Let me take you to page 57 of this booklet. If you find it, you will see there a whole range of activities that Government is doing for poverty alleviation under Social Welfare, Poverty Benefits Scheme, Child Protection, Social pensions, Food Vouchers, Women's Plan in Action, grant to Boards and so forth.

Under Education - Bus Fare Subsidy, under Health - free medicine, under Department of Housing - Lagilagi Housing Development Project, Social Housing Policy, informal settlement and so on. Under the Prime Minister's Office – funds for the education of needy children, under Strategic Planning, Northern Development Programme, and so forth. One needs to be able to understand the Budget and see the whole Budget to understand the impact of the Budget on various parts of the society such as poverty. In essence, the part that I have just read in addition to Social Welfare talks about around at least \$150 million focussed on those at the lowest echelon of our society.

There has been another statement saying that the Budget is boring. This is one thing I must say that once you develop a new approach, you must have the conviction to go through with it and keep at it. That is exactly what we have done. We have been consistent these past four years in the way that we have addressed the budget. One thing investors need is consistency in the long-term. That is one reason the investment has been low in this country in the past because policies have not been consistent. Now, we have that consistency, the Government has been consistent in its policies this has bred confidence and has led to investment. The result of all this; 29 per cent of GDP investment in 2013, 26 per cent of GDP in 2014. The first time that we have in consecutive years in which investment is above 25 per cent of GDP. Never before have we ever had that in the history of this country.

They do not get it. This Government has shown it will continue to show tenacity, it shows bravery, courage and willingness to go beyond the normal, a willingness to go beyond the conservative and consistency in focusing on growth that has an impact on everyone in this country. Those in the villages and those in towns, cities, all different ethnic groups, all classes of people of all generations. Consistency these past few years in putting in place the conditions that would allow a sustainable democracy to be developed, a democracy that would sustain itself, Madam Speaker.

We also aim to eradicate corruption, eliminate the race-based politics that have been our downfall, strengthen institutions, take the politics out of the sugar industry, and thus begin the road to recovery - all essential steps.

The learned Shadow Minister for Finance in his reply to the Budget put forth by the Minister of Finance was not able to provide any useful suggestions for moving the country forward. There have been a few, if any, innovative and long-term focused suggestions from his colleagues on the other side of the Chamber, perhaps, I should say the other-third of the Chamber.

(Laughter)

I am tempted to refer to some of the comments I have heard in this Chamber from the other side as “shallow, myopic, narrow minded, bigoted and short sighted,” but I shall not.

(Laughter)

Government has been accused of not understanding the minds of the *itaukei*, strange the vast majority of this this side are in fact *itaukeis*. We understand our own minds, so we must obviously understand the mind of *iTaukeis*.

(Laughter)

The old mantras do not work, the only constant thing in the world is change. Change will happen, change has happened, culture changes, language changes, everything changes. Our *iTaukei* culture has always evolved, the *iTaukei* culture and the *iTaukei* mind of 500 years ago is not the same as the *iTaukei* culture and the *iTaukei* mind of 200 years ago, it is not the same as that 50 years ago and it is not the same as the one that we have today.

(Laughter)

We need to keep up to speed with all this. The *iTaukei* in a traditional setting is different from that in the modern setting. The way that they think is different. One of the greatest gift that mankind

has ever received these past years in this country is the knowledge that all people are treated equal by this such a liberating thought.

Fiji's long-term future for this country depends on two things, at least two of the things that lead to that growth:

- a) a lot will depend on our ability to maintain consistency and stability; and secondly
- b) our ability to build strong institutions

We must build strong institutions in the country. It is these things that build confidence and equity in any country, and that is what this Government has been doing all along, and we are seeing the benefits now. There is renewed vigour, a climate of change and urgency in the air, urgency and confidence, Madam Speaker. All this has been built on a constant focus of delivering, on making promises - the promises that are making the constitution they are being delivered. But promises that were made in the FijiFirst Manifesto are being delivered through this Budget, and that is what we mean about delivering on all the promises that we have been making.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER. – *Vinaka!*

HON. J. USAMATE. - Government has shown clearly its emphasis on pro-development and caring for all. The people have taken note of this and they have roared their approval. An Election has been won on the basis of treating everyone equally and fighting for development, and not on scare mongering and pampering to the return of a yesteryear. People will no longer be fooled.

Madam Speaker, there can be no wealth without health. Health in fact is our wealth. Our vision in Government has been a simple one, to build a better Fiji. A better Fiji also means a more healthy Fiji.

The Bainimarama-Government has had to deal with and fix years of neglect, and this has been done. I appreciate those who served before me, as Ministers for Health in the Bainimarama-Government, both of whom are in this Chamber, for having started us off on the road to recovery. This is why this particular Budget has placed a lot of emphasis on Health. There is in this Budget, a massive increase for the Ministry of more than \$47 million to a total of \$269.7 million; an increase of 23.3 per cent.

That is a reflection of the importance that we attach to the lives of our people. All countries in the world are facing intense pressure on their health systems, even developed countries face these pressures. They all face rising demand for service. Here in Fiji, given the level of resources that we have, we may not be able to provide the same level of advanced care that our bigger and richer neighbors provide, but Fijians will get there. We will make sure that we can provide them the very best and the most up-to-date and capable care possible, facilities that are accessible, as well equipped as possible and professionally administered.

Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight some of the key features of this Budget. A lot of the speakers that have spoken before me have spoken about the massive increase this year, in terms of the human resources, so I will not talk about that to some extent.

One of the things that I must say, if there is a focus over the next few years in the Ministry of Health, it will be a focus on service delivery, and for service delivery, you need people. People who

know what they need to do, people who are switched on - head, mind and also attitude must be right, and that is something that will be focusing on.

We will be focusing on strengthening our Performance Management System to incorporate soft skills not just the hard skills, but the soft skills to include quarterly reviews and performance improvement interventions. We will be focusing on improving our culture in the Ministry to focus on all the values that we have, customer-focus, integrity, faithfulness, loyalty, and so forth.

We will make sure that people have money for the capacity building of at least \$1 million through the Government and hopefully more through the work of development partners. As part of the Civil service Reform, we will also be looking at enhancing leadership structures and capabilities and ensuring that we have the right leaders in place. Leadership is critical to achieving our aims. Good leadership leads to good results and leadership is critical at all levels for execution.

Infrastructure there has been a lot of comments made on the infrastructure that we have in the Ministry of Health:

- (a) Extension of Hospitals
- (b) Lautoka Hospital Emergency Department
- (c) Improvement of Health and Nursing stations
- (d) Construction of Low Risk Makoi Maternity Unit
- (e) The New Ba Hospital
- (f) Nausori Hospital
- (g) The upgrade of Keiyasi Health Centre
- (h) Valelevu Health Centre upgrade
- (i) Upgrade and extension of Rotuma Hospital
- (j) New Naulu Health Centre

In addition to this, you will also find that there are aspects of improvement in the health sector that is not in the Health Ministry, but also in the rural and maritime developments, and that includes the relocation of the Nacula Health Centre in Yasawa and the construction of staff quarters of Rabi Health Centre

Total investment in excess of \$40 million, and as we speak today Madam Speaker, we are about to open the Extension of Maternity Unit in Sigatoka; the Cuvu Health Centre and the Vatukarasa Health Centre. Those will be opened shortly.

Over the next six months, we expect to be opening the CWM Hospital Extension of the Operating Theatre and the Post Anesthetic Recovery Unit (PARU); and also the Lautoka Hospital Emergency Department, Phase .1

There have also been in this Budget a realisation that if you want to be able to provide high service delivery, you must have the equipment in place to deliver that service.

In the Budget for 2015, Madam Speaker, we have money that has been set aside for the following: Equipment for urban hospitals; Equipment for Health Centres and Nursing Stations; Dental equipment; Bio medical equipment and Accident & Emergency equipment, to the tune of more than \$7 million and that will be implemented in 2015.

One of the things that we have realised in the health sector, that as a Ministry, we need to focus on core business. We need to make sure that assets that are being put in things that are not core business need to be given to those that can do it better. So, areas like security and cleaning have already been outsourced and this will be spread out to the rest of the country. This outsourcing is to the tune of \$2.5 million.

Other special expenditure will include the 11th Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, where we will be re-visiting the vision that we had for health in the Pacific Islands, of healthy island concept. That concept will be reviewed this year with the range of programmes.

The Ministry will continue with its outreach programmes, where it takes its special services out to the members of the communities and to our citizens in Fiji that they do not have to come to the hospital but we take the service out to them. These are the Health System Strengthening (UNFPA) and the Health Information System. Also, money have been set aside for these programmes and will include Family Planning.

Furthermore, a range of programmes that will be delivered next year in:

- (a) Family Health;
- (b) Public Health;
- (c) Community Rehabilitation Assistance Programme;
- (d) Fiji Adolescent Reproductive Health Programme;
- (e) Food Supplement for malnourished children;
- (f) Child Health Development;
- (g) Baby Friendly Hospital;
- (h) Community Health workers;
- (i) Primary Eye care;
- (j) Oral Health Promotion;
- (k) Cardiac;
- (l) Oncology/Cancer; and
- (m) Typhoid Prevention and Outcome

These are all to the tune of more than \$1.2 billion, Madam Speaker.

One of the things that we have also realised that health is something that cannot be addressed only by one Ministry. In order to address the health of a nation, it has to become the whole of society approach. We need to get everyone on board – the Government, private sector, civil society organisations and NGOs. That is why, within the Ministry, we work together with our partners and there are operating grants that are transferred to these agencies so that they can also work towards the vision of a healthy population in this country.

Some of the organisations that will be supported in 2015, include the:

- (a) Kidney Foundation of Fiji;
- (b) Chanel Home of Compassion;
- (c) Father Law Home;
- (d) Reproductive and Family Health Association;
- (e) National Blood Service;

- (f) St. Johns Association of Fiji;
- (g) Local Rural Authorities; and
- (h) National Food and Nutrition Committee.

Some of the other areas that we will continue to assist that was set in place by my predecessors in the past is providing:

- (a) Overseas Medical and Consultancy to those who need referrals to the tune of \$1.3 million;
- (b) Overseas Visiting Medical Teams;
- (c) Transfer expenses;
- (d) Transport of patients (Local and Overseas); and
- (e) Minor works in urban hospitals and Subdivisional Hospitals, to the tune of \$860,000

Also, Madam Speaker, within the Budget, you will find that all the promises that we have made in our Manifesto will be delivered because that is the basis of this Budget, that we will deliver on all of our promises.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, there are a number of things that we will continue to focus on, such as the decentralisation of services, bringing health services right to the doorsteps of everyone in this country, as much as possible as our resources allow. We will continue to focus on the enhancement of our tertiary services, the development of CWM Hospital as a tertiary hospital and also, the new one that will be developed in Lautoka, as a result of the FijiFirst Manifesto.

We will strengthen our preventive focus, especially NCDs. We want to prevent people from having to go to the hospitals in the first place. The other area that we will be focussing on in 2015 is to re-engineer processes. I am a great believer in process re-engineering that if we fix the processes, the outcomes will be improved.

With those words, Madam Speaker, it is my honour and pleasure to commend this Budget to Parliament.

HON. A. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Budget response as presented by the honourable Minister of Finance on 21st November, 2014.

A lot has been said in this Chamber, Madam Speaker, but as the Shadow Minister for Health and Medical Services, my response will focus on the following:

- (a) Introduction;
- (b) Current situation;
- (c) Budget oversights;
- (d) Some recommendation; and
- (e) Conclusion.

Madam Speaker, health is both a fundamental human right and a sound social investment. The Government needs to invest resources in specific and appropriate health policies and promotion, in order to raise the health status of all citizens. The basic principle of social justice is to ensure that people have access to the essentials for a healthy and satisfying life. At the same time, this raises overall societal productivity in both, social and economic terms.

As rightly mentioned by the former speaker, “health is wealth.” Good health is a major resource for social, economic and personal development, and an important dimension of quality of life, which is why political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, behavioural and biological factors should all help sustain good health and not otherwise. However, we must not forget that the basic prerequisites for health are peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equality.

The prerequisites and prospects for good health cannot be ensured by the health sector alone, but more importantly, it demands co-ordinated effort and action by the Government, social and economic sectors, NGOs and voluntary organisations. This co-ordinated effort and action is very important, especially when we look at our present health services.

Current situation: Madam Speaker, all of Fiji know or have some negative experiences of health services due to the deterioration of our health services throughout the country for the last seven and a half years. Our health system is in crisis:

- (a) It requires a massive overhaul, starting from the most basic health care services to State amenities and hospitals.
- (b) The dilapidated and disgraceful condition of offices, waiting rooms and sanitary accommodations is appalling.
- (c) Laxity and poor management of supplies of drugs, medication, equipment and consumables in health facilities.
- (d) Shortage of doctors, specialists, nurses and ancillary staff.
- (e) Annual communicable disease epidemics.
- (f) Non-Communicable Disease crisis have disastrous effect on our people, in that:
 - i. Fijians are dying early.
 - ii. Our children are increasingly becoming obese and at risk of the related diseases.
 - iii. Our economic progress remains slow as our people are not healthy and die early.
- (g) Increased in Medical Evacuation Flights to major hospitals nowadays.

Madam Speaker, from a layman’s point of view, increase in medical evacuation shows that there is a shortage of medicine or appropriate drugs in the health centres; shortage or unavailability of doctors and nurses, and services cannot be offered in the rural or remote areas. These can be avoided if management takes good stock of what they have.

I will touch on the Budget oversight. Madam Speaker, in the last four years, I have observed a significant increase in the budget provision for the Ministry of Health. I have also noticed that the Ministry has been overspending its budget during the last four years. For example, from 2010, overspending amounted to \$15,115,698. In 2011- \$12,335,633; in 2012 - \$6,802,300 and 2013 - \$1,311,025. Once again, in the 2015 Budget, the Ministry’s allocation is \$269.7 million and my concern is; how much more overspending will take place come 2015?

My recommendations to the other side of the Chamber is:

- (a) For them to properly review their health budget programmes, there is a need for a proper reviewing of the Ministry's budget programmes, whether the budget allocation is meeting its intentions or otherwise.
- (b) Close monitoring of the Budget, to avoid future overspending.
- (c) Good governance and best practices to be in place.
- (d) A lot of mention in the debate about the use of chemicals and fertilisers, so there is a need to build a standard laboratory to conduct tests on food, vegetables and fruits, and root crops that are harvested from chemically infested areas with the use of fertilizers, insecticides to determine the chemical or toxic level contained in the products above so that medicine or drugs supplied are compatible to patients' quick recovery.
- (e) This standard laboratory also needs to conduct tests on genetically modified food, as earlier mentioned in this debate today, that has to be imported and sold in our country. We need the protection of our people.

An accessible health service to all Fijians by providing a standard rural health centre, maternity and dental unit for rural and maritime areas, that is, health centres have proper staff, store adequate medical supplies and drugs, shortening of waiting time, proper waiting rooms and sanitary to be provided.

Centralising these services only to major hospitals will create negative social and economic impact on the lives of people and families in the maritime zone islands.

Another budget proposal is the provision of allowance to all trained community health workers, who are our first point of contact towards basic health care in the community. Those are the *nasi ni koro*, as being provided to village headman and district provincial representatives.

A national campaign on Non-Communicable Diseases by all Fijians and to be co-ordinated by the National Wellness Unit of the Ministry of Health to strengthen the National Wellness Unit in terms of resources and research capacity to enhance a satisfactory intervention towards Non-Communicable Diseases, to avoid early deaths and obese. Also, to ensure that all Fijians have access to environment with adequate primary and preventative health services as well as community access to effective, efficient and quality clinical and rehabilitation services.

Madam Speaker, I had stated some realistic alternatives. I observe that the honourable Minister for Health is all ears while I am speaking and I have more alternatives in reserve

To conclude, "health is wealth." The Ministry has been continuously overspending year in and year out in the last four years. This could mean two things, either its fund has not been properly managed or its allocation is not enough.

I would think it is bad management and not enough money. I would therefore, recommend to the Ministry for better management of its allocation and ask that more funds to be allocated to the Ministry of Health, otherwise I do not support this Budget.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, I quote from *Psalms chapter 33 verse 12*:

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for His inheritance."

HON. MEMBERS.- Amen!

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, that is including you as well.

Madam Speaker, I rise to commend and support the 2015 Budget and in doing so, I take this privilege of thanking the honourable Minister of Finance for his speech in regards to the National Budget 2015.

It is most gratifying, Madam Speaker, at this stage to note that the Ministry is placing greater importance on the people of this nation, therefore announcing one of the best people-centred budgets in contrast to previous parliamentary budgets. I call it the “the mother and father of all budgets”.

(Laughter)

It is heartening to note that the Ministry of Finance has carried out an excellent task and ensured that the various needs and essentials from and within the various ministries have been met monetarily in this Budget. I am aware, Madam Speaker, how difficult a task it is to apportion the distribution of funds because it needs much preparations and deliberations as it involves national building.

I wish to go on record that in the past eight years, the nation and the nearby regions were awaiting the General Elections. Here, after successful Elections and now a Budget, may I therefore, congratulate the honourable Prime Minister for his choice of a responsible steward of the nation’s finance and likewise, I salute the honourable Minister of Finance for his perseverance and dedication in putting together a Budget, which will continue to grow the economy.

Madam Speaker, this is a great time in Fiji’s history, a time when the nation has experienced an exciting and an eventful turn of events in as far as the life of this Parliament is concerned. This relates directly to the issue of money, and of course the economy. We are here in this august Parliament today, thanks in part to the donations and contributions made by friendly nations towards Fiji. We are truly grateful and likewise, we are equally honoured by the generous gifts from two of the world’s largest nations, this being the governments of India and China. However, it is unfortunate, therefore, Madam Speaker, that the Opposition accorded the honourable Prime Minister from India with a boycott. I can say that the money is coming from this door and people are running out through the other door.

(Laughter)

One of the Opposition Members had shown his disapproval, the truth is this: “The same funds will benefit the very people who voted for them.”

To fulfil its objectives and goals to accomplish nation building, the Government needs much support and strengthening in terms of financial aid, and we have much to be thankful for in the timely funding from donors.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to tell a story. I know it has been boring sitting from the morning, as it is nearly 6.00 p.m.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, there is a small tree, we call it *bitu ni valagi* or Chinese bamboo, but it will grow. When one plants this Chinese bamboo, it will take four years. For the first year, one will put

manure and water (I am saying this as I am a farmer); the second year, manure and water; the third year, manure and water; and the fourth year, put manure and water. So, try growing one, there are plenty in Namosi. On the fifth year, this same bamboo will grow to a 100 feet and after another four years, this bamboo will mature. Madam Speaker, this Government is just starting now. We will be here for the next four years and in the next eight years.

One of the key areas of this people-centred focus of the Government is on the youths. I wonder what the pastors and pundits are doing in our country. It seems to me that they only go to pray in the market. I am new in Suva, but seeing the youths roaming the streets of Suva, for example, in Cumming Street, Mark Street, and all the other streets in the night, ...

(Laughter)

... those could be the right places for these pastors and the pundits to go and preach because I feel sorry for our youths.

(Laughter)

Some of these pastors and pundits only attack the wage earners because of their money.

Madam Speaker, youth empowerment and development is very important for the future of our any nation, and especially so for a small nation such as ours. With the reduction of the voting age to 18 years, it is important to note that our youths have a say in the affairs of the country as voters, whether they are high school students, at universities or in any area of the work force, employed or unemployed.

Madam Speaker, as I understand it, the nation and the sports people of Fiji in particular, have shown the desire to develop their own facilities in the rural areas, particularly in the various provinces and towns in terms of sports. This trend is an exciting one, in that professionally organised sports is now available at their doorsteps with all the necessary infrastructure and equipment.

Madam Speaker, we have witnessed and experienced how sporting activities in many parts of the world enables governments including our Government, which I support fully, to develop civil awareness among youth and foster development young people through multi-skill training.

Madam Speaker, where I come from, in Nadi, there are 50 nightclubs. For such a small town, why 50 nightclubs, apart from the big five-star hotels? One can see youths there every night and I beg the Government to stop these nightclubs from operating.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- As we have noted during the Budget presentation, there will be a promotion of sporting activities and development of sports facilities, which will be undertaken next year, in which a total of 16.7 million dollars is provided to the Ministry of Youth and Sports for this programme.

Madam Speaker, the Government has supported the international focus of the rights of youths to attend schools and encourage their talents, and we are fortunate that the first technical

college is in Nadi – Nadi College, with free fees. I therefore, urge all the Nadi youths to attend this College from next year.

Sports people and sporting youths are very fortunate that they are being provided with good facilities in terms of the use of the sporting complex, professional training and also attaining allowances while representing the nation. Madam Speaker, this is a far cry from my experience as one who represented Fiji in rugby. We were only given allowances, provided with accommodation and rations. Apart from that, we were not paid or contracted. My point, Madam Speaker, is, we should keep expecting higher achievement rates and performance levels as the Government continues to better its service.

Madam Speaker, we are also very proud that a sum of \$2 million has been allocated to cater for these sports next year, which was announced by the Minister of Sports. During our time, especially in representing the Rugby World Cup in 1987, the players were not provided good training facilities, for example, gymnasiums, et cetera, and we were not paid like other overseas teams. We are fortunate that the Government has changed this system where today, players are paid or compensated for their efforts.

Madam Speaker, the Minister for Sports has a huge task within these four years, and on this note, I raise the issue of inexperienced coaches in all sports in Fiji. It is therefore, very encouraging and most heartening to hear the good news that Government has allocated \$2 million, to engage overseas coaches to provide international expertise in sports development. We have experienced that most of our coaches in all sports are not professional and we really support the Government in introducing these assistance this year, and by doing these, we could attract and hire reputable coaches with international exposure.

Madam Speaker, overseas countries gain profitably from income-generating sports, where many talented sports people have become millionaires because they started their career during their youth. If youths are being trained by professional coaches, income-earning opportunities are viable and we can stop youths from being sent to prison, because they are being engaged in youth development.

Madam Speaker, I think the ministry needs team work, and the honourable Members of Parliament need to encourage our people, with due respect of where we come from be it villages, towns and settlements, in terms of youth and sports.

Madam Speaker, sports makes people fit and healthy. One example is the Nadroga Rugby Team. Although I am not from Nadroga, I however, praise this team. Listen!

(Laughter)

Rugby development starts from their youths, and these youths do end up playing for their provincial teams, and that is why the Nadroga Rugby Team has proven to the nation and the world how to develop and support rugby in their province.

HON. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka!*

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- If all sports do apply the system used by the Nadroga Union, all sports in Fiji will be highly competitive and benefit the Fijian economy.

Madam Speaker, as we have experienced in previous years, most of us in this august Parliament are former rugby and soccer players and Ratu Cakobau Park has been the sporting ground for Tailevu, Naitasiri and Rewa.

We are fortunate that the government of China has continued its commitment to fund the Vunidawa Sports Complex, and that will be a big morale booster for the people of Naitasiri as they deserve to have a sporting complex like most of the provinces in Fiji do .

Madam Speaker, the famous Lawaqa Park will be upgraded to the total amount of \$3 million, and the National Sports Commission will receive an operating grant of \$800,000.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the Ministry will prioritise its projects based on which facilities need urgent work. So, within the four years, we can wait for who voted for you - tell them to wait.

(Laughter)

I urge the people of this nation to support this Ministry, the Minister, honourable Laisenia Tuitubou and his deputy, the honourable Iliesa Delana and if there are any other issues regards the sporting complexes, this august Chamber will debate on it.

On that note, I would like to thank the Minister for Youth and Sports and his staff for a good Budget.

May I conclude Madam Speaker, may I wish the honourable Members, Madam Secretary General and the staff of Parliament a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to add my support for the Appropriation Bill that is currently before this Parliament. I would like to begin by congratulating the honourable Minister of Finance for presenting an inclusive and well-balanced Budget. Inclusive not only because of its coverage, but also for actually including the input of the general public in putting this Budget, together through a National Budget Forum. It is unfortunate that I did not see any member of the Opposition attending that Budget Forum to contribute positively.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! hear!

Madam Speaker, we all know where the criticisms and contributions we have been hearing for the past few days will end up - in a vote.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! hear!

Madam Speaker, one of the greatest accomplishments of this Budget is that it not only presents Government's plan for the coming year, but it also reinforces a long-term vision for future development. It demonstrates exactly the kind of bold, innovative and big picture thinking that was lacking in most of the speeches this week by honourable Members across the floor.

The simple fact, Madam Speaker, is that this Budget moves Fiji forward and puts Fiji first. It makes smart investments in our nation's future, and it addresses critical areas necessary for a vibrant and growing economy; infrastructure, education, health, the marginalised in society, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and of course, land management.

Madam Speaker, honourable Members will be aware that my Ministry consists of the Department of Lands and the Department of Mineral Resources, both of which play a very crucial roles in our national development. For 2015, the Ministry has been allocated a sum of \$32.9 million to carry out its core functions.

Madam Speaker, I would like to spend my allotted time this afternoon, focusing on the specific provisions for programmes and initiatives that fall under my portfolio.

Madam Speaker, the identification and development of new water sources is a very important task for Government, in its efforts to provide all Fijians access to clean water, a right that is enshrined in the Constitution. Therefore, my Ministry is grateful for the allocation of \$565,000 for ground water assessment and development. This allocation will help us to continue to give more communities, which do not have access to the Water Authority's infrastructure, an alternative source of clean water. This is particularly important for communities on smaller islands.

Madam Speaker, to help carry out this work, a budget of \$2.6 million has been allocated to purchase a new drill for drilling boreholes, which is expected to greatly improve the efficiency of the drilling process compared to the three weeks it currently takes to drill a single borehole. For 2015, the Ministry has a preliminary list of 20 locations for drilling in villages and settlements which have serious water-access issues. But Madam Speaker, I would like to add that since Government has zero-rated duty on plant and machinery, we are also working to get the private sector more involved in this important work, which would greatly enhance the service provided to the Fijian people. This is yet another example of the big picture thinking this Government engages in across a very broad front.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also thankful that Government has made mining safety a priority through this Budget. A sum of \$50,000 has been allocated to the mining inspectorate to improve occupational health and safety in mines. A further sum has also been allocated for the environmental monitoring of mines and quarries. This sum will allow us to work with the Department of Environment, to ensure that environmental issues pertaining to the extractive industries in Fiji are adequately addressed in developmental initiatives.

Madam Speaker, there has been an allocation for the community development and field support. This will allow us to strengthen our programme of consultations with stakeholders, including landowning groups about the mineral resources sector.

Of course, Madam Speaker, Government recognises the huge potential that the Mining Industry offers for economic growth. That's why in addition to the \$300,000 allocated to continue identifying potential mineral deposits, a new allocation of \$390,000 has also been made for the upgrading of our Geochemical Laboratory, to allow our geologists to determine the mineral content in rocks here in Fiji, rather than sending samples overseas for analysis. This will have a big impact on speeding up the process of identifying potential mineral deposit sites locally.

Madam Speaker, switching to Lands. A sum of \$800,000 has been allocated for the regularisation of informal settlements in accordance with the FijiFirst Manifesto. With this funding, we will be able to bring security of tenure to many Fijian families living in informal settlements who have been deprived of the ability to build their own homes due to their status as informal settlers. We will work very closely with the Ministry of Housing to ensure that this initiative is driven in a co-ordinated and timely manner.

Government has also allocated \$1.8 million for the development of unutilised State land, which includes the construction of infrastructure and the creation of sub-divisions. And \$800,000 has also been provided for the maintenance of existing sub-divisions.

Another key feature of this Budget pertaining to the management of State land in Fiji relates to the allocation of \$520,000 for the Land Use Master Plan and the National Land Register. These two initiatives Madam Speaker, will combine to form the backbone of Fiji's National Geospatial Grid. Geospatial information services and platforms are critical technologies that support national development, boost economic growth, improve decision-making and enhance policy formulation. There is a growing recognition amongst both Government and industry that a detailed and comprehensive understanding of location and place is a vital component for future development.

Madam Speaker, to improve the performance of the Land Bank, in 2015, Government has provided \$2.5 million for capital projects on the land that has been deposited to make it more investor friendly. This is an important allocation that will allow us to continue to provide better results for the landowning units that decide to deposit land with the Land Bank.

Madam Speaker, the Department has also received a new allocation for the acquisition of satellite imagery, to reduce our reliance on aerial photography, which is costly and unreliable. This will allow the Ministry to produce up-to-date small and large scale maps. It will also open up opportunities for Government and other relevant institutions to improve on remote sensing in Fiji.

The allocation of \$150,000 for Geodetic infrastructure will allow the Ministry to begin the preliminary work required to modernise our national survey control points, to bring them up to par with international standards. The current Fiji Geodetic Datum from 1972 is not compatible with the modern technologies used by Civil Aviation Authorities, Navigation Organisations and other relevant stakeholders. I am thankful to Government for recognising the urgent need to address this issue now.

I am also happy to announce that as of this year, the Ministry has managed to complete the demarcation of *iTaukei mataqali* land boundaries in Namosi, giving the *iTaukei* landowners their certainty in their land tenure.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to discuss one of my Ministry's most important initiatives in the new. In line with the upcoming reform of the public sector, we have been given an allocation to begin preliminary work on reviewing the core policies and laws pertaining to land management, mineral resource extraction and the regulation of valuers and surveyors in Fiji.

This is essential as some of the current provisions in these laws are outdated and are a hindrance to development. They need to be put on par with current development models and approaches, and they need to be brought into harmony with the Constitution. The end result, Madam Speaker, will be greatly improved services for all of our customers.

Madam Speaker, our work programme for 2015 highlights the need to work in close collaboration with other Ministries and stakeholders, whose roles are closely aligned to our core functions. We will therefore, seek to establish various inter-agency forums to ensure that there is effective co-ordination in the implementation of our capital projects and programmes in 2015.

Madam Speaker, I am happy with what the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources has been allocated in the Budget for 2015, and I am certain that with the concerted effort from the team within the Ministry, we will be able to achieve our goals for the coming year. Therefore, as the Minister for

Lands and Mineral Resources, I endorse the 2015 Budget and give it my full support and I thank you, Madam Speaker for your attention.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I will keep my comments very brief. As you are aware, that I ought not to speak on the second reading of the Appropriations Bill because I was keen to listen to the contributions of honourable Members on the other side, or give credence to the right of reply by the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, when I was listening to the official response from the honourable Dr. Prasad and indeed comments from the other side, I started thinking about the voters who voted in the recent Elections. Madam Speaker, in my thoughts, I thank them once again, wholeheartedly because they are the voters who decided to keep the so called Shadow Finance Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and her team where they rightly belong - in the shadows.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In fact, this is why we probably see a lot of shadow boxing from the other side.

Madam Speaker, I do not say this as a trite comment, I say this because of the fundamental lack of understanding of economics, the inability to see the economy as a whole, the undertone of threats based on ethnicity or race, the lack of a basic understanding of commerce, running corporations, the private sector, and of course, the absence of knowledge and logic.

Every single contribution of the Opposition was replete with contradictions and lack of knowledge, and indeed a vision. The honourable Members of the Opposition even contradicted each other. They talk about growing the economy but have an undercurrent of separate development and threats of instability. How can you obtain investor-confidence? On one hand, they talk about using locals and local companies and some of course, based on ethnicity, but do they not want the best person for the job. Do they not want training and capacity building first and appointments on merit? Is the objective to maximise the returns to shareholders, or to appoint someone, just because you like them, even though they may run the country to the ground?

(Chorus of interjections)

Let me give you an example. Fiji Pine Limited, for the first time in its 40-year history made a profit in 2013. It had for the first time paid bonuses to landowners, now twice. I understand, Madam Speaker, that they will be paid again next year. They made a provision of \$1 million, they had paid taxes for the first time and they had paid a debt outstanding to the European Investment Bank since 1985. Its subsidiary, Tropic Wood borrowed \$6.5 million from Fijian Holdings in the middle of 2013 which was repaid, Madam Speaker within 17 months with an interest rate of 8.75 per cent – unheard of. All this was possible because the right person was appointed to the right job.

(Chorus of interjections)

It does not matter to the landowners that the CEO's name is Faizad, would it matter if it was Mary or Prem? No. What matters to them in indeed their communities and to our country is that the company does well to everyone's benefit.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Now the landowners are renewing their leases because they are seeing the benefits.

The other side talks about import substitution not working, yet talk about creating jobs. Have they thought about food security and foreign reserves depletion which, mind you, is the highest ever it has ever been? Let us go and tell all the dairy farmers not to produce milk because we get cheaper ones from New Zealand. Also, let us go and tell our poultry farmers in the rural areas, through the village schemes, to stop growing chicken because the Aussies, Kiwis and Brazilians can dump cheaper chicken in Fiji, with it they bring their diseases.

Madam Speaker, they talk about getting Qantas to tell us what to do. Qantas made a cumulative loss of \$2.9973 billion in four years, yet on the other hand, Fiji Airways, our national carrier, our pride, for those of you who are truly patriotic, who are true Fijians, is set to make a historical profit of \$60 million, unprecedented in 2017. The staff now get a share of the profits. Do they know that when the Rabuka Government went cap in hand to Qantas for it to increase his shares from 17.5 per cent to 46 per cent, Qantas, even though a minority shareholder, received majoritarian rights.

Lesson One for today - Commerce. Majoritarian rights in this sense means that when a minority shareholder acts like a majority owner. So, since then, even though we Fijians own 51 per cent of Air Pacific (now Fiji Airways now), Qantas had veto rights over 19 areas control of the company.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They decided on the new routes, when they flew, the chairmanship, deputy chairmanship, appointment of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and capital, operating and other expenditures. We, Madam Speaker, on the other hand (put mildly) were the poorer cousins, or put it in another way, we were simply listening to the Qantas' *turaga*.

Madam Speaker, they talk about one million arrivals in tourism, but they do not talk about yields. Do we want to risk who will come and spend six to seven thousand years dollars in five days, or do we want tourists who spend one thousand dollars? They all have to go to the toilet, use our water and use our roads. Imagine the amount of infrastructure pressure there will be.

Let me remind them, Madam Speaker, it was the Bainimarama-Government that broke the 600,000 visitor arrival barrier. Let them also understand the dynamics of new tourism in the world today. The Chinese and the Indians are one of the highest spenders today. Yes, we want the Aussies and the Kiwis, we will continue with that, but we need to advertise in new markets. This is why \$12 million is pittance, to be able to market Fiji to 350 million homes throughout the world.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Of course Madam Speaker, we have changed the disequilibrium that existed in Qantas. Do they know that when we partially divest, we also allow for capital injection? It grows the capital markets, it allows ordinary Fijians to invest their savings in the capital markets. It does not mean you comprise security at the airport - what a preposterous idea! Sydney Airport is privatised, Madam Speaker, like half of the airports in the world. But the reason or the rationale that we should not do so is because we will lose control of our security, customs regulation and bio-security.

Madam Speaker, we have already said that there will be partial divestment, it creates great efficiency. Partial divestment has already taken place in the ports terminal, where efficiency has increased in about 33 per cent. No longer are levies being charged on container goods coming to Fiji because of the slow turn-around time. Now, the goods are becoming cheaper.

They also went about the former Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase's pension. It will be paid, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER. – Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not realise we would be pushing them.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, it will be paid, but what baffles me is they were so passionately arguing about this, they were so keen on their lease getting paid, but they forgot about these people. You see these women? (*Article shown to honourable Opposition Members*) These women who worked in the Civil Service in the Colonial times did not get paid their pension. They knocked on the doors of the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) Government, the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) Government, the Alliance Government, but it was the Bainimarama-Government who paid them what was due today.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You know why Madam Speaker, I did not hear the Shadow Minister for Women advocating for them, nor the Leader of Opposition, do you know why Madam Speaker? The difference between them and us is because we care for the ordinary people. We can build bridges and jetties everywhere, not only to the selected few.

We are compassionate, Madam Speaker, we target our assistance and we will become even more targeted. We think long-term, this Budget is long-term. We do not try and score cheap political points. We are holistic in our approach, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this is the only Government - the Bainimarama-Government that ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). We are now on the peer review team, we are in fact now being called by others to review others. The previous governments failed to do that, and I know that for a fact.

Madam Speaker, it makes me shudder because they talk about good governance. It makes me shudder to think that the other side is the alternative Government. Madam Speaker, Heaven help us!

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, Heaven help all Fijians! But, then again, Heaven has in fact helped us because FijiFirst is on this side with an overwhelming majority. I think frankly, Madam Speaker, they are yet to come to grips with the fact that they are in the Opposition and we are in Government. To be relevant and constructive, they need to lift the game, indeed they need to be relevant to all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the contributions by the Opposition cannot be taken seriously. Once again, they have demonstrated in their responses their absolute reliance on deception, half-truths and deliberate misinformation. Amongst all of these, the thing most noticeably lacking from the opposite side of the Chamber this week is the single truly original, or new idea. On a number of occasions, their contributions were simply quoted or rephrased, a single newspaper pander economist, who has long been discredited because of blatant political bias.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Fijian people truly, Madam Speaker, surely deserve a higher level of sophistication from the elective representatives.

Madam Speaker, in fact the Budget presented to this Chamber is bold, responsible and appropriate to Fiji's needs and resources, but most importantly it underpins FijiFirst Government's long-term plan for Fiji for a united, and prosperous Fiji for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I note that the Leader of the Labour Party is making representation to the honourable Leader of National Federation Party (NFP) - what a wonderful Budget it is, which brought these two parties together.

I am afraid Madam Speaker, the honourable Shadow Minister continues to underestimate the determination and capability of the Fijian People to achieve this vision that we have. It is ambitious, yes, but we must never rescind ourselves as a nation to thinking it is beyond our reach. The FijiFirst Government knows that we, together, can turn this dream into reality - turn promises into deeds. Clearly, why we all live under the same sky but we all not looking at the same horizon. However, the negative view of the economy portrayed by the other side, Madam Speaker, demonstrates either wilful ignorance of the facts, or wilful attempts to mislead the public. If it is the latter, Madam Speaker, I wonder when the Opposition will try telling the same old lies. The facts, Madam Speaker, are there for all to see.

With next years projected growth, Fiji will achieve six years of consecutive growth, and for the first time in the last 40 years, we will achieve a growth of more than 4 per cent for three consecutive years.

Madam Speaker, there is a lot that I could say, but I will cut it very, very short, because obviously, we realise it is long time, where the attention span of some people are shorter than others.

Madam Speaker, I would like to correct a misconstrued claim by the other side that the growth has been largely driven by the public sector, with little contribution from the private sector. The Opposition are trying to suggest that there is no investor-confidence and that private sector investment is low to so-called crisis of confidence. The truth is that, apart from the long list of ongoing investments by the private sector, there is an even longer list of new projects lined up to begin work soon. Our investment to GDP ratio is projected to be 26 per cent for 2014. Private sector investment accounts a large share of this at 15 per cent of GDP, while Government's investment, including public corporations, account for about 11 per cent. Of the private sector investment, around 9 per cent Madam Speaker, is made up of local investment, a clear sign of confidence in the Government's policies.

With the recent Elections and re-engagement with our development partners, foreign investments is expected to increase further. So the truth is, Madam Speaker, that investor-confidence is already very high, and will continue to grow. Of course, the supplement investors from the private

sector, Government is contributing to economic growth through investing in large infrastructure projects, highlighted by the honourable Minister for Infrastructure, which are roads, water, sewerage, bridges, hospitals, schools, just to name a few. Such investment is necessary to facilitate and encourage new investments from the private sector, but more importantly to improve the living of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the men and women in the shadows claimed that the Budget is based on unrealistic and unsustainable policies and is reliant on recurrent revenues. They argued that it will increase the country's debt for future generations. They claimed that the nation's debt is now \$4 billion, when as a so-called economist, the Shadow Minister for Finance should know that debt is not an absolute number and one must look at debt relative to income, or as a ratio of GDP as a best measure of debt sustainability. Indeed, a debt to GDP ratio of less than 50 per cent is regarded as sustainable for Fiji and is supported by the IMF's Article 4 Report. In fact the debt to GDP ratio is about 48.7 per cent, 48.9 per cent.

Madam Speaker, this Government's fiscal record speaks for itself. During our term in Government, as of 2013, we have recorded an average deficit of 1.5 per cent, this is very far by third parties. Unlike the previous government - December 2006, which posted an average deficit of 4.3 per cent during their tenure. Yet, the debt amount has increased, but on closer examination, one will note that the total debt that we have incurred is \$1.14 billion compared to the \$1.42 billion incurred by the former government.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- On average, we had borrowed \$143 million annually, compared to \$238 million borrowed by the former SDL government, some of whose members are sitting opposite us today.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A careful analysis of the Budget will also show that Government's operations are fully funded from its operating revenues. We have increased our operating surplus to around \$500 million, from a mere \$145 million in 2005. Madam Speaker, I will be very brief now.

I will go onto the issue about using asset sales to claim a lower deficit and a lower debt level. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that Government still uses the 1986 Government Financial Statistics, which correctly classify asset sales as part of revenue. The use of GFS 1986 is not a deliberate attempt to record a lower deficit, as insinuated by honourable Members. In fact, the IMF, in their recent Article 4 Mission acknowledged and understood Fiji's reason for using the existing classification, given that the Government financial system still operates on a cash-basis and more so, like most Governments, our balance sheet is still partial. Since the IMF is the guardian of the GFS standards, we should allow them to be the judge on this matter.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition continues to quote outdated figures on poverty. I am glad the Shadow Minister for Finance actually said that it is now about 33 per cent when in the Elections campaign, he was saying 45 per cent. There are many other areas that we have addressed in terms of the welfare issues, but I would just like to point out one small anomaly.

Madam Speaker, the Shadow Finance Minister also intentionally misrepresented Fiji's ranking in the *World Bank Cost of Doing Business Report*. He said, and I quote: "The World Bank ranking on ease of doing business puts Fiji last among the top 81 countries."

Madam Speaker, what he failed to disclose or conceal the fact that the survey actually ranked a total of 189 countries, amongst which Fiji was in fact ranked 81st – which is in the top 43 per cent globally, and of course, we are improving.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I would like to now round off. There are a number of issues that I would like to address and I would like to hold some informative sessions with the other side, and which I would love to do. I am making a very serious proposition - let us do that before we go into the Estimates.

Madam Speaker, I have much pleasure in recommending the 2015 Budget to the Parliament. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for Finance for his right of reply and I thank everyone for that very lively discussion.

In accordance with Standing Orders 99(3), the Bill has been read a second time, the Bill and the Estimates now stand is referred to the Committee of Supply. The Parliament will begin with the Committee of Supply next week, on a day to be decided by the Business Committee

The Business Committee will meet when Parliament adjourns this evening.

Honourable Members, the Parliament is now adjourned to 9.30 a.m. tomorrow.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.05 p.m.