

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 9TH JULY, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 9TH JULY, 2018

The Parliament resumed at 9.31 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Lands and Mineral Resources.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 28th June, 2018 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously .

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to the first day of Budget debates and as all Members are aware, the Budget process is an integral role of any Parliament.

I also welcome the members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet and listening to the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Address by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea - Hon. Peter O'Neill

For the information of Honourable Members, later on I will invite the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, the Rt. Honourable Peter O'Neill, who will address Parliament on issues pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The Business Committee had agreed to the Address by the Honourable Prime Minister straight after the response from the Shadow Minister for Economy and in this regard, the Standing Orders will be suspended.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. SPEAKER.- As is convention, the Leader of the Government in Parliament will move

a procedural suspension motion pursuant to Standing Order 6(2); I am allowing this without notice as I consider it necessary for the proper conduct of the business of Parliament.

I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Orders 23, 34 and 46 be suspended, to allow the following during the sitting period beginning today, Monday, 9th July, 2018 and ending on Friday, 13th July, 2018 –

- a) Parliament to sit beyond ordinary sitting times;
- b) Limiting breaks, including lunch to be determined by the Speaker so as not to unduly interrupt debate; and
- c) In the event that the business for any given day is concluded earlier than anticipated, that business be brought forward from the following sitting day.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this motion is purely procedural and has been agreed to in principle by the Business Committee and the Party Whips, and is necessary to enable us to complete the Business before the House for the entire week and, therefore, Madam Speaker, commend this motion to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is before the House and I invite input, if any.

There being none, I call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to make concluding remarks if he so wish.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have no further comments to add.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Orders 23, 34 and 46 be

suspended to allow the following during the sitting period beginning today, Monday, 9th July, 2018 and ending on Friday, 13th July, 2018 –

- a) Parliament to sit beyond ordinary sitting times;
- b) Limiting breaks, including lunch to be determined by the Speaker so as not to unduly interrupt debate; and
- c) In the event that the business for any given day is concluded earlier than anticipated, that business be brought forward from the following sitting day.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have been advised that there will be no consideration of additional Bills today. We will move on to the next Item on the Agenda.

HON. SPEAKER.- Secretary-General?

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- The Honourable Minister for Economy to move the second reading for a Bill for an Act to appropriate a sum of Four Billion, Two Hundred and Forty Nine Million, Twenty Nine Thousand and Two Hundred and Ninety Eight Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July, 2019 (Bill No. 10/2018).

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General, the Minister for Economy, to move the second reading of the 2018-2019 Appropriation Bill 2018, Bill No. 10/2018.

DEBATE ON THE 2018-2019 APPROPRIATION BILL 2018

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That a Bill for an Act to appropriate a sum of Four Billion, Two Hundred and Forty Nine Million, Twenty Nine Thousand and Two Hundred and Ninety Eight Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July, 2019 (Bill No. 10/2018), be now read a second time.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for his second reading speech, if any.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, as per convention, I do not have any comments to make in respect of the Second Reading. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate and we will follow the Batting Order which has been agreed to. We will start with the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy, who

will speak for the same amount of time as taken by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy during the First Reading.

I now call upon the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy to have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I wish to begin with the words of a great Philosopher, Lucius Seneca, who once said, "True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future, not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears but to rest satisfied with what we have, which is sufficient, for he that is so, wants nothing. The greatest blessings of mankind are within us and within our reach. A wise man is content with his lot, whatever it may be, without wishing for what he has not."

I rise to formally present the Opposition's response to the Budget Address, as delivered by the Honourable Minister for Economy, on 28th June, 2018.

I must, at the onset, thank God for his provisions and for the breath of life, allowing me to be here today. I also extend my acknowledgment to the Party leadership of SODELPA for allowing me for the second time, to represent the Party for this important task. I am deeply honoured.

I also thank all those who have worked hard to assist me in the preparation of this response. To Mr. Pita Wise and Sainiana for their professional guidance; to Ben Daveta, the evergreen, Ratu Isoa Kamarusi; Asena; Luisa and others I may have failed to mention, who assisted to put this response together; I am very grateful.

I also give special thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for her motivation and allowance for us to work late into the nights to prepare. Thank you most sincerely.

Madam Speaker, the media have always succeeded in raising the interest of people every time the announcement of national budgets are upon us. They have often been able to make people believe that it is definitely one of the highlights of any national calendar. Perhaps it is. Indeed expectations are raised and people look forward for their burdens to be eased a little, whilst at the same time, people recognise and cringe at the thought of how much more they will need to dig to meet all the promises that Government ambitiously propagates.

Human beings by nature are restless. We continue to want; we continue to pursue our dreams; and we continue to aspire for better lives. There is nothing wrong with that, Madam Speaker, but there is an ethical question that is tied to our desires - how much more do we want; how much more can we afford, and what expenses do we pursue our ambitions? With all the questions asked, I am persuaded to consider the answer lies within what the first US President, George Washington once said, and I quote: "That we must consult our means rather than our wishes".

Madam Speaker, the 2018-2019 Budget, if accepted at face value, seems like a Budget that CARES for the people of Fiji. It presents a rosy picture about what Government intends to provide for the people of this nation.

The FijiFirst Government, in its second attempt at being democratically elected, is trying very hard to retain its leadership. Following the modernisation era that started for Fiji way-back in the early 1970s as the major road networks started connecting Fiji from Suva to Lautoka via the Queens and Kings Road, as well as other roads around Fiji; and our international airline started flying to overseas destinations, opening up the world to our doorsteps; and our maritime zones began

revolutionising travel to frequent our outer islands weekly and even daily, Fiji was well on its way to establishing itself as a leader of the Pacific Region.

But of course, Madam Speaker, our political history writes another story, that is of struggle and ethnic and social agitation, supported by political characters that now form part of the Fiji's history literally. The Government we have before us here today has repackaged their own role in that journey, Madam Speaker, which began in 2006, with the overthrowing of the Qarase-led Government as a radical intervention.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Since then, with the same breath that they have worked their public relations machinery

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Members, please, the same respect you accorded the Minister for Economy when he delivered his Budget Speech, which means no interjections to disrupt the presentation, we must accord the same to the Shadow Minister for Economy, please. Allow him to speak without disturbance. Thank you, Honourable Members.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- They must accept the truth, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Since then, with the same breath that they have worked their public relations machinery to repackage themselves, they have driven the same propaganda to over-ride their negativity and dark history with policies and Government initiatives that they look like they care, but in actual fact, confirms further their hidden agendas.

Nevertheless, in thinking of our people and in appraising what now surrounds us, it would be remiss of us not to acknowledge that some of the acts of the current Government is worth commending. We see some beautiful roads and bridges, and we see some beautiful state-of-the-art buildings, and we say, "It's what any government must do anyway, to put to good use its taxpayers' money."

Madam Speaker, at the same time, we see our people receiving lots of Government handouts. The FijiFirst Government calls them "assistance", we call them "irresponsible policies" that does not truly care about Fijian families.

We, on this side of the House, and a growing majority of people in this nation know for a fact that all the FijiFirst Government cares about is staying in power and to do that, they will go to any extent, including raising our debt to an unprecedented level never before seen in the history of this country. Their mantra is, Madam Speaker, Political Survival at all costs! That is why the Budget for 2018-2019 has been set at \$4.6 billion and a budgeted revenue of \$4.2 Billion, with a net deficit of \$414.2 million or 3.5 percent of GDP.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government is showing signs of a government desperate to escape from its shadowy past. This is a Government intent only on its political survival, and our national coffers is the means to an end when it comes to their naked ambitions.

On that note, Madam Speaker, some burning issues that I will focus on today include:

1. revenue and taxation;
2. receipt of public shares;
3. debt level and expenditures;
4. certain social policies; and
5. infrastructure issues.

And my colleagues will then delve into various sectoral allocations in detail.

Madam Speaker, on the economy, the FijiFirst Government has said that Fiji's economy is on an unprecedented growth. We wish to differ. We believe that Fiji's growth trend has continually declined to around 2 percent. We have reasons to believe that the figures by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) are manipulated. I have warned before what happened during the Asian Financial Crisis. Manipulation of figures to portray a healthy economy, eventually crashed their financial institutions and the repercussions are still being felt today.

We fear the same for Fiji and we believe our economy is extremely vulnerable right now, and is underperforming. The 2 percent growth rate is not only lowered to create employment for our new school leavers, but it is also vulnerable to inflation because of very low income capacity. Overall, this affects the underprivileged and the poor of our society the most.

Ideally, our growth rate should be sitting on 5 percent and a SODELPA government will ensure this is done. We will provide job security and encourage an environment of investment that is not restrictive as is currently faced with the FijiFirst Government, where only some favoured companies are receiving Government support for financial loans from Fijian financial institutions like the FPNF.

Madam Speaker, we keep lamenting that the cost of political instability in Fiji is significant. Some have tagged this cost to be around billions in lost opportunities. We must be able to resolve this and this will require strong political will that addresses the insecurities which form the basis of ill-will.

It is common knowledge that envy or the inability to afford decent lifestyles often breeds contempt. For example, indigenous Fijians have often viewed the accomplishments of Indo-Fijians and others from a position of resistance, whether real or otherwise, as leaders, we have the responsibility to address this anxiety or threat by assuring the equal participation of our people in active economic activities. Capital injections and Government partnerships with landowners, for example, need to be promoted, as a SODELPA government will do this.

Madam Speaker, we are under no illusion that all our aspirations can be mere wishful thinking if we are unable to afford them. Thus, we understand Government will need to be creative and improve productivity in order to derive economic growth.

At present, there are many drawbacks tied to low productivity. One of them is the traffic congestions that we now experience on our roads. People leave homes at all sorts of ungodly hours. There is no consideration given to the stress commuters have to go through with long queues and bumper to bumper travel every morning and afternoon. Government decides in a dictatorial manner through Fiji Roads Authority which road to conduct maintenance on, as and when they wish. This often springs up overnight and suddenly people find themselves being asked to find alternative routes to use which can be both very frustrating and costly to unsuspecting travellers.

Madam Speaker, we now need to shift our attention to look at our various economic sectors. Since the phasing out of the garment industry and bottled underground water that took the boom in

the 1990s, Fiji's main economic sector now rests with two volatile industries, namely tourism and foreign remittances.

Our economic base has been stagnant and our traditional industries, like agriculture and manufacturing are declining dangerously. Sugar, gold and timber exports have also declined, compared to 2006, Madam Speaker, whilst fish production has been fluctuating.

Government has been lavishing praises on itself for its consecutive growth rates experienced since 2008, Madam Speaker, of course, they are delusional. There are so many reasons to doubt that picture is correct. Nevertheless, we will remind them that in the 1990s, under the current SODELPA leader, the average growth rate rose to over 4 percent. The FijiFirst Government, with all its fanfare, has merely been able to achieve around 2.5 percent growth and this is well-below average performance.

Madam Speaker, it must be noted that our growth rate in these recent years had been driven hugely by consumption. This is fed by the many freebies that the FijiFirst Government has allowed the Fijian people to become reliant upon, and this is minimally supported by people's wages and salaries.

I must say that by lulling people into thinking they have a lot more cash in their pockets with policies like an increased tax threshold, Government has been able to manipulate spending styles. Clothes, food and luxury items like cars have become an obsession and people now want more than they can afford, so what happens as a result? People tend to take advantage of Government freebies and become increasingly reliant. The long queues during post *TC Keni*, *TC Gita* and *TC Josie* is an indication of these habits where people run after the CARE initiatives and after accessing of the FNPF members' funds to continue feed their never ending cravings.

Madam Speaker, some genuinely need assistance but the high level of prosecution by the Government under the False Information Act is indicative of a worrying trend of people wanting to take advantage of ill-managed processes and opportunities.

Madam Speaker, in fact. Government has in recent years shown blatantly that it does not genuinely care for the Fijian people, dipping into their retirement funds from their FNPF after natural disasters is nothing short of a political gimmick and an indirect attempt by Government to inject consumer spending into the economy. The Government must and should always bear the responsibility of assisting citizens following national disasters. They should make use of the National Disaster Management Office.

On that same note, Madam Speaker, it is ironic that Government is allowing members to dip into their retirement savings. This contradicts their intent of restructure of the FNPF. Government must, therefore, do the right thing and compensate pensioners who were badly affected following the restructure of the FNPF.

Many of them have stories of sufferings to tell which is sad when they share their sufferings, they knew they were going to receive when they retire. They made commitments accordingly. So when the restructure came, many of them were caught off guard and many went into depression and the reality is, many of them are now living lives of poverty because as pensioners, they are not eligible to social welfare assistance. Further to the injustices, Madam Speaker, they have faced, the FNPF Decree continues to prevent them from being able to pursue legal redress in court for this matter.

Madam Speaker, a SODELPA government will prioritise a compensation for these pensioners. We will also ensure we grow the economy by ensuring the private sector is supported with the right environment conducive to increased investor confidence.

We will remove the excessive control currently displayed by the FijiFirst Government and promote development through equal opportunities for all races.

We will introduce partnerships between resource owners and investors to reverse the current trend of resource rich and cash poor that landowners often lament.

Madam Speaker, we will review the restricted list of activities that has been opened since 2009 by the Investment Fiji which has killed off the smaller businesses that used to be previously occupied by local entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, it must be publicly stated that the FijiFirst Government has failed to establish any new industries, and they have as a result, allowed our people to remain in positions of poverty and reliance.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has stated that its revenue collections has hit the \$4.3 billion mark. Mostly its components were acquired from 27.4 percent of direct and 63.8 percent of indirect taxes. This is an increase of 10 percent from last year. What this means, Madam Speaker, that Government continues to take from the ordinary Fijians and their one size fits all policies is hurting the poor.

I cannot help but to state, Madam Speaker, in the indirect tax, VAT is a major component of revenue lines. What we have noted that for the estimated revenue, the VAT forecasted is always over forecasted. What is collected in reality is much lower. What this means is that there is a deficit in available revenue to match the planned implementation of projects or expenditure.

In the 2017-2018 Budget, VAT revenue was forecasted at \$944 million but what was actually collected was \$768.5 million. In simple terms, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Economy is very smartly presenting to people promises of attractive give-away and sweets; to meet that cost will be another issue. No wonder some major projects that often get people all excited when announced by Government remains an elusive dream today.

Madam Speaker, meanwhile the arrears of revenue has increased from \$146 million to close to \$200 million. We on this side of the House put this down to the many failed initiatives of Government that have been reflected as investments, but failed to materialise like the inconclusive Waila City and the elusive 100 Sands Casino. Similarly, there have been many other business ventures that have been recorded as statistics, but have not become realized investments.

Madam Speaker, in our budget books in the last two years, the sale of Government assets had been listed under Government Revenue. They were to complete the revenue streams where the deficit lay. For this year, the Government has recorded the reforms of State-Owned Entities and is anticipated to improve the financial performance of public entities. And in that respect, we note that Energy Fiji Limited, formerly known as Fiji Electricity Authority, is again listed to be divested to institutional investors to generate revenue. What is not known is how much this divestment will bring to Government.

Madam Speaker, the truth of the matter is that these listed assets have been continuously listed as investing receipts since the first Parliament Budget in 2014, but since then, they have never materialised. Thus we continue to inflate our revenue figures, giving a deceptive impression of our financial position.

In my earlier speeches in this august House, I had stated that if the selling off of strategic public companies must be done, this must be on the basis that they are not operating feasibly and it would be better that Government saved itself from pouring further good money into keeping them afloat. But what we are seeing is that, the two companies that were publicly listed for divestment of shares are already doing well; both Fiji Ports Corporation Limited and the then Fiji Electricity Authority of Fiji. So what is the real intention of divesting these two companies? Is it for repayment of the unprecedented accumulative debt or is it really to deregulating the sectors where efficient and cheaper services are being said will be achieved for the Fijian families?

On that note, Madam Speaker, EFL recently offered for its individual domestic account holders non-voting shares. This, will of course include the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy. So much for accountability and transparency.

Madam Speaker, Government expenditures have sky rocketed at an unprecedented level. Government is on a spending spree. It is using up money more than it is making. This is the people's money that we are talking about. A lot of this money is being used on places that requires Government financial injections like infrastructure. However, Madam Speaker, the high level of financial drain on taxpayer's coffers is shocking. We look at one example.

I have highlighted this in this House previously, but on the eve of Elections, I need to remind the people again that instead of the previous \$1 million per kilometre that was previously used by the Department of Roads to construct a one kilometre road, under the FijiFirst Government, an average of \$10 million is being used to spend on per kilometre of road currently being rehabilitated and constructed at Nadi from the Airport towards Wailoaloa Junction. Apart from the infrastructure, the Government has so blatantly through veiled assistance, given freebies to our people that we might as well create a society that is dependent.

It is our view, Madam Speaker, that the FijiFirst Government is trying to play with emotions and the minds of people by giving this new \$1,000 parenthood allowance, the CARE initiatives and others. Whilst they may be indeed needed by some in our society who are in dire situations, the way that Government has disbursed assistance programmes of late however, without conducting prudent checks first for verifications is indicative of their wanting to create mass publicity. The recent declarations that over 100 people are being charged in court for abusing the CARE initiative indicates a Government that is not only draconian, but blatantly manipulative.

With the nation on the eve of General Elections, the Government giveaways is growing. People now get all sorts of freebies. The Budget for 2017-2018 under Head 50 has a massive allocation of \$568 million and last year was \$628 million. This is more than the normal amount of less than \$100 million kept under this Head by previous governments.

I note that the TELS and Toppers allocations of \$205 million that should be under the Ministry of Education is now under Head 50. The Office of the Auditor-General needs to take note of this allocation. It seems to be coming directly under the Honourable Minister for Economy and whilst some may argue that it is necessary for prudent monitoring, we can also suggest that too much financial power in someone's hands is bound to attract all sorts of criminal exposure and abuse of office.

Madam Speaker, our economy is narrow-based and dependent on very few primary export commodities with price volatility. It is driven by high consumption and a high importation of food; and a high inflow of personal remittances. With this kind of high expenditure budget, we will remain very vulnerable especially with the kind of unpredictability in weather patterns now being experienced. Tropical cyclones and extreme flooding have continued to affect our nation badly.

Madam Speaker, we must always be conservative in our approach of economic management and this Budget again, is not reflective of that.

There are now many discussions revolving around the real debt level. It is stated to be \$5.6 billion, but we on this side of the House say it is \$6 billion, if we add all the contingent liabilities. This will equate to around \$6,500 debt burden that each person in Fiji is settled with, compared to 2006, it was around \$2,500 per person then.

One thing for sure, Madam Speaker, that the FijiFirst Government is making all sorts of reforms including Civil Service and Private Sector Reforms in order to align itself to its heavy commitments to the debt stock ratio, both domestically and externally.

In his Address, the Honourable Minister for Economy says that the current level of debt is sustainable. But as I have already stated in this august House, the debt overhang is dangerously excessive and Fiji is looking at real possibilities of facing a major financial crisis.

Madam Speaker, Government's spending is at the highest ever recorded in Fiji's history. We are spending more than we are earning from revenue and to equate Government's never ending lust to spend, we have borrowed at a rate which now stands at the highest ever recorded. Debt levels by end of 2006 stood at around \$2 billion and this is an accumulation of debts from over the past four decades.

The FijiFirst Government is always saying that it is also repaying debts of past Governments. Madam Speaker, all governments do that, but it has to be noted that within the 12 years of their rule, the current Government has tripled the level of debt from 2006.

On their own since 2006, the FijiFirst Government in an unprecedented trend, has borrowed more than \$4 billion and becomes the first Government in the history of Fiji to do that.

The Honourable Prime Minister in his recent speeches said that they borrow to spend on infrastructure. Well, Madam Speaker, we note some infrastructural development taking place, but the people of Fiji also know of the recent scams uncovered by KPMG, where over \$33 million alone was utilised for plant hire by Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) for a period of 15 months alone.

Madam Speaker, the irresponsible way in which the current Government is borrowing will mean our youths will, in the future, be saddled with high debt repayments that will deprive them of their ability to spend on essential services, like education, health and infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, this Government has been arrogant in its attitude to ambitiously grow and modernise this nation, which it has done at a speed we may not be able to sustain economically. At the rate we are going, Fiji could very well experience a domestic financial crisis, leading to a recession.

Our foreign revenue streams are vulnerable, Madam Speaker. We have remittances as the highest income earner, closely followed by tourism. Both those income streams are susceptible to global risks.

Immigration laws have become tightened in countries, like the United States of America where a lot of our workers are. Likewise, changes in the recruitment of foreign soldiers serving in countries, like Britain have started to happen and our sons and daughters in the British Army have slowly returned home, thus affecting remittances which is expected to continue to decline. On the other hand, the increase in climate change effects through flooding and natural disasters is expected to have an impact on our tourism earnings in years to come.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government is making us live beyond our means. This Government continues to put the future of this country at risk. The increased difficulties our people are facing daily is the realistic picture of our economy.

We must reduce deficit and slow down the accumulation of debt. We must also stop the wastage and I again re-emphasise what I have been driving in this august House in the last four years; reprioritization of our expenditures.

Madam Speaker, on inflation, the Budget suggests that our average inflation rate will be hovering around 3 percent at the end of 2018. It was noted that instantaneous price increases were felt for fruits, vegetables, kava, alcohol and tobacco. We believe what should also be included is education and other domestic items which was also certainly felt.

We also note that the RBF has warned that inflationary pressures will be driven by higher fuel prices and trading partner inflation, as well as high domestic demands for the remaining months of the year, thus the trend will be quite alarming. With a bullish Budget of high expenditure, this will surely push inflation further, if not properly managed.

Interestingly, Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that the liquidity in our banking system continues to increase as at the end of May 2018, with liquidity set at \$526 million. This was said to be due to Fiji's strong reserve position.

However, according to the RBF's June 2018 Economic Report, Madam Speaker, liquidity in the banking system fell by 9.9 percent, led by a decline in foreign reserves, coupled with an increase in currency in circulation and statutory reserve deposits.

The RBF further states that higher global food and oil prices and adverse weather conditions remain key risks to the inflation outlook, hence they caution that price developments will be closely monitored in the coming months.

By April 2018, credit to the private sector had grown by 7.7 percent to \$7.5 million. This is spurred by low interest rates, stiff competition between banks, and growing consumer and business confidence.

The RBF Economic Outlook in June 2018 contradicts Government's credit growth rating that the private sector credit growth has slowed to 7.8 percent in May, compared to a 14.3 percent growth in the same period last year.

Madam Speaker, this inconsistency in economic forecasts and status reports between Governments' leading financial institution and the Ministry of Economy indicates further that we have a Government willing to fabricate and be deceptive to the people of this nation. It is uncalled for, it is low! It is preposterous, it is plain evil, Madam Speaker. The lies just have to stop!

We cannot continue to trust in a Government that contradicts its own government institutions. The people of this nation must be strong to show the FijiFirst Government that we have had enough of their manipulations and mind games, Madam Speaker.

It is a day of shame for me to stand in this august House, to analyse such a contradictory status to the people of Fiji, our investors and to the international community, who rely on us as leaders not to mislead them with important information that makes a lot of difference in their decision-making for everyday living, Madam Speaker.

We have a theory, Madam Speaker. One, it is Elections year, and we had the recent tropical cyclones. Borrowings will be low. People are uncertain of the future, even for a short-term period because Government has not helped and has kept us all waiting for election dates.

Investors and our own everyday citizens need to know what they can do. They need to be provided with a stable political environment, not the kind of shaky and shady environment the FijiFirst Government continues to give us all, nor one shrouded in secrecy, Madam Speaker!

Madam Speaker, on the issue of taxation, it is common knowledge that the bulk of Government revenue is derived through taxation.

Madam Speaker, since 2015, licences have been strongly emphasised for business operators which include, roadside hawkers and vendors who sell *kai* or freshwater mussels, including fish and other produce. Without licences, these goods are confiscated.

Madam Speaker, when Government started giving out the \$1,000 cash grants, part of their conditions attached required recipients to have paid and obtained licences. These license fees become Government revenue.

Madam Speaker, we all know, of course, that not all who apply for the licences get that assistance. So, it is obvious that the Government's revenue not only captures fees from successful small business owners but also captures by default, revenue from failed applicants.

The indiscriminate way in which the FijiFirst Government is establishing its bullish policies is badly affecting our people and as said, it can only worsen the lives of the already marginalised and the poor. The poor will get poorer, Madam Speaker, whilst the rich will become richer.

In the 2018-2019 Budget, the estimated levy to be collected is \$171.379 million from the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL). The most commonly known commodity taxed is the collection of plastic bag levy which is used by all citizens. Under this new Budget, this has been increased to 20 cents from the previous 10 cents per bag. It is obvious that when plastic levies was introduced, the revenue earned from ECAL was significant.

If we were to argue, for example, on the use of ordinary bags, paper is probably better, for one simple reason that it is likely to decompose. Plastic can take years to disappear and in breaking down, can release toxic materials. By increasing the 10 cents levy to 20 cents, our people will now bear an increased burden on a population with more than 30 percent or one-third of its population already living beneath the poverty line. It is sure to harm the poor more.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to turn our attention onto another aspect of revenue collection that Government is trying to tighten its hold over, and this is on the Point of Sale System and the Sales Data Controller System that it has introduced in 2017. According to the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS), this is set to capture real value of business transactions and assist to realise actual tax owed when it comes to tax revenue collection. Businesses are being encouraged that those new systems will help them improve management and ease administrative procedures.

Again, Madam Speaker, Government has introduced sweeping changes across the board without consideration for struggling small businesses, who will now have to meet additional costs of internet and electricity to maintain those systems.

It is obvious that the obsession of Government to collect all forms of revenue is making them become so draconian, that it is exploiting friendly business diplomacy based on trust. It is almost like

having the police watching you and working with you every second of the day, whilst you go about doing your ordinary business. The environment being created is repressive and controlling, not to mention expensive for smaller businesses.

Madam Speaker, briefly on investment, although Government is boasting about the increase in registration figures, stating that there was a surge in foreign investment registrations from 257 in 2013 to 418 in 2017, there are actually no figures given to confirm the actual implementation of those projects. This kind of ambitious figures, Madam Speaker, again, makes us very sceptical over the whole genuineness of the statistics provided, especially when we note that Government submits that for the period of 2017, over 100 local companies were assisted for business development and only 31 projects actually reached implementation.

Madam Speaker, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a recent economic analysis has revealed that investment in Fiji has been on a downward trend since 1980, and has been a key factor contributing to the low growth of the Fijian economy. The analysis attributes the pronounced decline in private investment to be a cause of the fall in Fiji's investment levels.

In the analysis, IMF has revealed that public and State Owned Entities (SOEs) investments over the years have been relatively stable. However, in 2011, private investment fell sharply to its unprecedented lowest recorded levels in 60 years to just 2 percent to 3 percent. The IMF noted it to be the lowest since Fiji's Independence in 1970, Madam Speaker, and this happened during the FijiFirst Government's watch.

The IMF analysis further reports that whilst investment figures have improved, Madam Speaker, of late the largest investment into Fiji's economy is done through Government's public investments (largely on roads and infrastructure), which has continued to increase substantially.

In 2012, this made up 28 percent of Government's total operating expenditure. In 2013, it rose to 32 percent and in the 2018-2019 Budget, this has ballooned to 48 percent of the total operating revenue, and continues to be indicative of the desperate efforts by Government to stimulate demand.

According to the IMF analysis, private sector has shown signs of recovery, Madam Speaker, but it has come at a cost of substantial Government's stimulus packages, including reduction in corporate taxes from 30 percent to 20 percent. It is lowest still at 10 percent for companies listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange. So again, I re-emphasise that the rich are getting richer with the FijiFirst Government, Madam Speaker.

Overall according to the IMF analysis, foreign investment remains below potential with approvals and projects implemented being almost 50 percent lower today than it was in 2006.

Madam Speaker, let me turn our attention now to the issue of everyday living and in this respect, we will look at the Constitutional right of people to afford decent housing. For years now this country has been falling deeper and deeper into an abyss where the comfort of owning a home is a far-gone reality.

In his Budget announcement two weeks ago, the Honourable Minister for Economy announced the newly established Ministry of Housing and Community Development that will look after the policies they have introduced for housing. We note that the new policies being introduced will not address the housing crisis but contradict the Housing Authority Act, that is mandated to cater for the middle and low income earners. Those policies being introduced is a simple exercise of vote buying. A SODELPA government will offer a better alternative.

Madam Speaker, the cost of houses are so outrageous. People have tried to escape to places where they can afford homes. But, 10 years ago, a decent property costs less than \$100,000 in Nausori but today, the same property will cost around \$300,000; all because the supply of affordable housing is limited and Government has failed to provide necessary housing supply through the relevant agencies, like the Public Rental Board (PRB), Housing Authority, HART, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, to give a clear picture of how desperate people are getting, I want to use the Raiwaqa Housing at Jittu, as an example of how the poor are becoming even further disenfranchised. A quick look at the housing offered in this area that was first built to accommodate squatters will reveal that a lot of those homes are now being taken up by middle income earners, who can now afford only around \$40,000 to \$60,000 to own a home, but nothing more.

Madam Speaker, I first sounded this warning in this House four years ago. I had stated that if Government did not address the escalating housing prices, Fiji will soon become another Australia or New Zealand, where it becomes impossible for the middle class and the low income earners to own properties. A SODELPA government will address this lack of decent housing by increasing the housing supply to cater for the increasing demand.

We will also note that the FijiFirst Government has introduced policies that limit the purchase of properties in the cities and towns to locals only. However, there are so many examples of this policy not being followed. One example I have been given is a group of Asians who registered under Investment Fiji to form a company, which then bought a property which sits on a Crown land in Namadi Heights. I think the Honourable Minister for Economy is aware of this.

Another such questionable sale property ownership is a soon to be the tallest building in Suva. And what about the vacant land close to Sardar's in Raiwaqa, and the former Raiwaqa Market opposite the Ministry of Agriculture? Who owns those properties now, Madam Speaker? When were they bought and at what cost?

Madam Speaker, I note as a social policy, Government has allocated \$300,000 to fund the community-based Corrections Act 2018. Whilst this is commendable, the funding allocated for that is not sufficient. It has to be genuinely provided for, to make this a genuine display of community rehabilitation and reconciliation with offenders.

This nation deserves a government that truly cares. Tokenism policies that look good on paper but do not materialise into actual acts of goodwill, fail in the category of human modesty and dignity, Madam Speaker. On this matter, I also wish to urge the Government that the much awaited Mercy Commission which is overseen by His Excellency the President on the recommendations of the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy needs to be brought into practice to allow those that currently languishing in prison but could access this service due to good behaviour to do so.

Madam Speaker, I have made this plea to Government since 2014 and now we have come to an end of our parliamentary term, it still has not materialised. It shows a stubborn Government and one that does not care about the Fijian families. A Government not genuine in its will to bring about rehabilitation and foster forgiveness as they often preach. It makes me question the real intent of the Yellow Ribbon Programme. If we look at the current Commissioner of Prison, Madam Speaker, I have personally dealt with him on a number of cases where he has been very accommodative and I must thank him for having the heart to accept back into the Commission some Prison Officers that committed small disciplinary issues.

This is a classic example of a fellow citizen who benefitted from the Yellow Ribbon Programme and was re-introduced back into society to continue being an asset to the nation and to his family. His

acknowledgement of such, is displayed through his goodwill back to others as I have alluded to. That is why, Madam Speaker, I encourage the Government that these policies must be made available to everyone and not just a select few. Let us make this about the people, Madam Speaker, and not about ourselves. We have to be bigger than the politics that threatens to overwhelm us, and create in us a widening rift on intolerance and indiscrimination.

Madam Speaker, overall the Government is establishing great initiatives like the CARE Programmes and the continuing special welfare assistance that my colleague, the Shadow Minister responsible in this area will speak on. But I just wish to say very briefly that a SODELPA government will better current services and provide better alternatives. We will build a nation of people who are empowered to look after themselves rather than being dependent on Government. A SODELPA government will allow people the dignity to look after their families with decent wages that allows them to be self-reliant.

On the Parenthood Assistance Payment, Madam Speaker, this past week we have heard in this country never ending discussions about the real intent of this policy. Some have speculated it is intended to address population growth. The Honourable Attorney-General has intended to assist Fijian families in meeting with the need of new babies. From a humanitarian perspective, I must commend that for single mothers and for our rural mothers, this would be a relief. Of course, the cost of meeting the needs of a new child is always very expensive and so placing \$30,000 and below threshold for household income as a qualification is good and they will really appreciate it. I have heard stories of women being ashamed to give birth at major hospitals around Fiji because they lack proper baby clothes and are unable to return to the hospital the hospital kits they use like diapers for children and Stay Free pads, et cetera.

A SODELPA government will consider taking this further to allow payment as well for parents whose children are still-born. The funds can be then redirected towards funeral costs and medical recovery of mothers, who would be traumatized by the loss of their little ones.

Madam Speaker, the Civil Service Reforms continue to beg lots of unanswered questions. One thing is certain, that following the Reforms, a lot of vulnerable civil servants are losing out on their jobs. We continue to hear daily contracts of people serving in Ministries, like Agriculture, Justice, Works and Transport not being renewed.

The system being adopted by the Government is very manipulative. People have to reapply for their positions and in most Ministries when reviewed, 70 percent of staff are losing their jobs. Ironically, excuses being given like those in the Ministry of Justice, former staff are losing out to new graduates. This is not true. Some who are being hired, have very little job experience in the Civil Service, Madam Speaker, and no qualification likewise.

Madam Speaker, as stated, the same sad story is being relayed from other wider Government ministries and it is now questionable, if Government is on a suicide mode. Certainly, these kinds of practices will hurt them in the coming elections. On the other hand, perhaps they have done their figures and note that they can afford to lose those numbers because they are banking on picking up popularity from vulnerable communities like squatter settlements, Madam Speaker. Whatever the strategy is, it is inhuman and does not genuinely serve our nation.

Madam Speaker, whilst on the issue of Civil Service jobs, the Parliamentary staff have had a reduction in their budgetary allocation and it is quite sad that these staff look after this august House, its Members and our welfare. Most of them are looking forward to a job evaluation and possible improvement in their packages. I urge the Honourable Minister for Economy to consider their plight, Madam Speaker.

On the same note, Madam Speaker, I wish to draw your attention to Section 134 of the 2013 Constitution, in particular the position of Secretary-General. Section 135 states that the position of the Secretary-General to Parliament is an appointment of 5 years with the possibility of re-appointment.

I draw out this section, Madam Speaker, on humanitarian grounds. This is a position that serves this august House and the person holding the position must be immune from political influences. The incumbent is sure to be uncomfortable with my raising this issue, however, we wish to raise this issue because it is an issue about adhering to the highest law of the nation, that being the Constitution.

On another note, the current Government, Madam Speaker, often talks about caring for families. The Secretary-General has a family and young children to support. Her husband may be another victim of the reforms of Government. He was a Permanent Secretary and is yet to reach his retirement age, Madam Speaker. His contract has ended. Whether he chose to do so personally, I am not aware. However, I urge the Government that in the spirit of caring for families, to review the position of uncertainty that the Secretary-General is being placed under and do the decent thing according to law. Extend her contract to the mandated 5 years, please.

On a separate matter, Madam Speaker, as part of Civil Service Reform, staff trainings and capacity building has been widely encouraged in Government. One such mechanism being adopted is to have Government to Government training programmes like that of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Pacific Leaders' Educational Assistance for Development of States (Pacific-LEADS) scholarships an offer which was part of the 7th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 7) Agreement reached in May 2015.

Under this Agreement, Madam Speaker, the Japanese Government would fund young leaders of Pacific Island countries to be educated with Masters' Degree in Japan with the objective of fostering them and enhancing relationships between Japan and our country. Three batches of civil servants are going to be attending these trainings. Two batches are already in Japan and the third one will be leaving in September this year, Madam Speaker.

Staff from the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Department of Environment, Fiji Meteorological Service, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Economy and even the Prime Minister's Office are part of the current trainings in Japan. Sadly, the conditions of their scholarship was not clear when they departed. Many of them were under the impression that they would be on paid study leave because they were identified in their office, from within their Ministries and told to apply for scholarships.

The whole arrangement raises lots of questions on the integrity of Government. The first batch of students who left in 2016, Madam Speaker, are all on paid leave. Yet, the second batch of students who left in 2017, only one of them is on paid leave. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister in his recent visit for the PALM 8 Summit, was informed of the plight of these staff, however to-date, they have yet to receive any relief.

The discriminatory way in which the officers have been treated is worrying Madam Speaker, but what is worse is the misleading information they received, which compelled them to apply for the scholarships, as advised. This questions the ethical issues of Government's administration abilities. Their families are now suffering, Madam Speaker, here in Fiji and for some of them, their mortgage payments are struggling with the possibility that they may lose their homes. We can expect these officers to underperform in their studies especially for those who are being affected.

Madam Speaker, I urge the Honourable Minister for Economy to review their scholarship arrangement and to ensure that the next batch leaving shortly are not additional victims to this sad state of affairs. On that note, Madam Speaker, I also call upon the Minister for Employment to please step in and provide assistance to these affected civil servants.

Madam Speaker, so much can be said about our infrastructure but the most important is the obvious neglect of our rural roads in favour of urban ones. Unfortunately, it is the rural people who fund the bulk of our economic activities with farming and the likes. From a \$100 million budget in 2006, we now have a budget of over \$500 million. Of this high budget allocation, wastage and exorbitant cost of outsourcing chews the most of these taxpayers' funds or debts that will be repaid by our future generation.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government boasts about improving the standards of roads in Fiji. However, it must be noted that they have hardly built any new roads or established alternatives. With all the hypes they create when commissioning projects, the roads they establish is seen needing maintenance soon after completion, some are even incomplete. This was evident in the Korovou to Matavatu Road, likewise the Naqali to Serea Road, Koronivia to Lokia and the Keiyasi Road.

Madam Speaker, we also wish to highlight that the roads mentioned above are not in the breakdown of roads and bridges programmes in the Budget Information Booklet. Also, Madam Speaker, why is the provision for Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) under a Special Head - Head 43 on its own, especially when it is an organisation that comes under the leadership of the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure? Likewise for Water Authority of Fiji, Madam Speaker, what is so special that the arrangement is made this way when other State-Owned entities receive their allocations from their respective Ministries, like the Land Transport Authority (LTA), Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) coming under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport? We look at other similar entities like Tourism Fiji that comes under the Ministry of Tourism and the Agricultural Marketing Authority which comes under the Ministry of Agriculture.

This sort of arrangement raises questions about leakage and abuse of public funds where the line of reporting and accountability is questionable, Madam Speaker. If we look at the current status of FRA and WAF, Parliament in the last four years in fact has never received an Annual Report from either of them. Under this budgetary allocation, Madam Speaker, the monitoring element of the disbursement of funds for FRA and WAF in particular will become a major concern.

On that note, Madam Speaker, there are numerous requests that have been forwarded to FRA from communities, so I will raise them again since they still await years later for these proper road access and maintenance to be facilitated.

For the villages of Wainalotulevu and Nasoqo in the *Tikina* of Veinuqa in Namosi, Madam Speaker, they share that they have yet to get a road access and school students, for example, have to walk or go on horseback to reach their schools. There is also a bridge request for the crossing at Namado in the village of Nakavika in Namosi that remains a desperate need, Madam Speaker.

For Serua, Madam Speaker, villagers and teachers in the area have asked for the road at the village of Waibogi is in a deplorable state and it would be appreciated if this can be tarsealed to provide a lasting solution as it hosts the schools for the *Tikina* of Nuku.

For Lomary Primary and Secondary Schools, there is a request for speed limits from the Deuba side, Madam Speaker, as students have had many near mishaps because of speeding vehicles in this vicinity.

At Bemana, Navosa, a request for an Irish Crossing maybe or even a bridge would be appreciated to cater for the two schools and two villages on the other side of Sigatoka River. Community members have shared that there are numerous farming settlements too on this mentioned side of the river and it becomes a risk wading across the river during or after heavy downpours with strong currents.

The schools in these areas have highlighted that they have been provided with a boat but it is a tiny one and not OHS compliant. Teachers at these schools bring their shopping and bags and walk for at least 100 metres to the river bank, then they haul their shopping on their backs and wade across the river. Madam Speaker, this is heartbreaking stuff, an untold misery and human sacrifice that communities and civil servants have to endure. Yet, we see some lavish spending on the Government on roads that are already accessible. Perhaps it is an issue of “out of sight, out of mind”, Madam Speaker.

There is also a request for a bridge at Nasavusavu, Nalawa in Ra which provides access to a number of villages in this part of Ra. It has been damaged for a number of years and as a result, villagers and the community members have to walk with their heavy luggage to the other side of the river to get home. The high risk involved is again a matter of urgency, Madam Speaker, and we urge FRA and the Government to look into this matter.

Madam Speaker, as per my earlier mention of certain roads and Irish Crossings in this august House, I acknowledge and wish to thank the Government for the allocation of funds to the Sawanikula, Korovou, and Nasauvere Road and Crossing as well as the Nakorosule and Nawaisomo Road. Stages I and II and note the Naelewai/Nasoqo Road has also been budgeted for. This is much appreciated. However, the Waibasaga Irish Crossing to Waibasaga Village remains in need. I would appreciate, Madam Speaker, if this can also be urgently looked into.

Madam Speaker, on the issue of Traffic Congestions, this continues to be a burning issue. It is understandably causing people much frustration. As I previously mentioned in this House the FijiFirst Government does not seem to bother about the stress that our commuters face when travelling daily due to traffic congestions. The length of time it has taken to complete projects is an embarrassment. The Koronivia Road to Nausori extension, for example, is a nightmare for travellers daily. It has been three years in the making.

Madam Speaker, the renowned Economist and former Governor of Fiji had earlier tagged the cost of traffic congestion to be costing the country around \$370 million a year in lost production. Following the Government’s decision to reduce Customs Duty on reconditioned hybrid cars, we have experienced unprecedented traffic congestion. This was done without proper planning for road expansions and obviously a study that was conducted by the Transport Planning Unit to determine the road capacity per car ratio was ignored. To travel from Nausori to Suva now takes almost three hours on worst days, even every day. When we have road accidents on some of these busy roads, it can be even longer, it is sheer madness, Madam Speaker. The public is made to put up with these congestions without a say or choice.

Now with the notable reduction on fiscal duty from 32 percent to 15 percent for used vehicles aged two years and below, we can expect an increased volume of vehicles to hit our roads again shortly. We see this as arrogance and assisting car businesses while putting more Fijian families into debt. Government is wilfully forcing its policies of so-called development on people.

Madam Speaker, it would be amiss of me not to comment on the plights of the many Fijian families that have not been cared for by the government because they have been frustratingly awaiting

the outcome of their taxi permit applications, despite following detailed processes and requirements from LTA. Some have even gone to paying their base fees with municipalities because that was the requirement when applying for the taxi permits. Some have gone even further to construct taxi bases and have bought their cars as it is the requirement from LTA. Today, Madam Speaker, they are still awaiting for any feedback on the status of their application.

We note that some taxi permits have recently been given but what of those waiting since 2012, Madam Speaker, and some even earlier when the taxi freeze was in place. How is government prioritizing the issuance of permits? Madam Speaker, the truth that Fijian families need to know is that this government lied to you and they do not care about you and all that you have spent to obtain your permits.

A SODELPA government will ensure that we will not let you down and ensure that we process your permit applications at the earliest without making you spend unnecessarily. We will ensure that we liaise with the Local Municipal Councils on base applications so that there is no overlap on applications and applicants are left victims of these current madness that exists.

Madam Speaker, we acknowledge the funding given to LTA, especially for pay increments. The staff deserve it. On that note, it would be great if the LTA would expand its services to other rural and outlying areas, especially to maritime zones, places like Vunidawa, Tailevu and Namosi who have also asked for these provisions to ensure easy accessibility of driver-testing to the general public.

Employment institutions are now asking for a valid driver's licence like the Fiji Police Force, for example. It would be logical for this service to be made available easily for all the communities of this nation because a SODELPA government will take this service down right to the doorsteps of the grassroots people.

Madam Speaker, the WAF has recently come under spotlight for all the wrong reasons. The abuse of public funds has been highlighted in a KPMG Report. What has become synonymous with WAF is the inability to meet the growing demand of our people in providing them with clear metered water. In this Budget they have been provided \$349 million, another \$9 million is expected to be directed to the entity through aid-in-kind and direct payment. We hope, Madam Speaker, that Fijian families will be provided with clean drinking water as it is a right, mandated under the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the New Water Supply and Wastewater Management Project is set to be the biggest project ever for Fiji. Its estimated cost will be around \$405 million to be established over the next seven years as revealed by the Honourable Prime Minister last year. We note this has begun featuring as part of the overseas loans in this Budget. We urge Government to tread cautiously in its implementation and monitoring.

The Green Climate Fund and non-traditional financial systems, like the European Investment Bank, have already made their commitments. It is now upon Fiji to deliver within the value for money and to apply prudent financial management. Our communities deserve better in this modern day and era. Instead of the intermittent water cuts we have experienced, Government must provide long lasting solutions and be pro-active especially after natural disasters. The growing of algae last year in the Vaturu Dam for the first time in the Fiji's history requiring that it be shut down for a few months with water rationed, is a stark proof of mismanagement and laxity on the job.

Again earlier in January this year, an estimated 165,000 people in Nadi and Lautoka were without water for almost a week because major maintenance works had to be carried out. Our people, young mothers and farmers do not deserve excuses, Madam Speaker. I implore Government to do

better than what has been provided by WAF so far. In fact, a SODELPA government will ensure we do not put our people into the kind of peril they currently languish in.

HON. SPEAKER.- I beg your indulgence, we will give you exactly the same time, but I need to intervene now to bring in the Honourable Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea who has arrived. Please, bear with me now.

(The Honourable Speaker escorted the Honourable Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, the Honourable Peter O'Neill, into the Parliament Chamber)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, you may be seated.

On behalf of the Members of Parliament and those watching from their houses, we would like to welcome you. It is a privilege and honour to have you in Parliament at this time, thank you.

I now invite the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to continue with his reply.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In fact, a SODELPA government will ensure that we do not put our people into the kind of peril they currently languish in. On that note, a SODELPA government will bring back the Department of Water and Sewerage and also the Apprenticeship Schemes as currently under the FijiFirst Government, companies have now resort to bringing in skilled labours from Indonesia and Malaysia because Fiji is losing its skilled labour force to the region, especially in Australia and New Zealand.

Australia, in seeing Fiji's Apprenticeship Programme close down, Madam Speaker, it started the Australia Pacific Technical College (APTC) in Fiji and this establishment now trains the skilled labour force that is feeding their labour markets as ordinary Australians turn to white collar jobs in preference to trade work.

Madam Speaker, when Fiji as a developing nation moves away from up skilling its labour force, we will suffer as a nation. The cost of hiring expatriates will chew up the bulk of our budgets and in the long run, we will be the poorer for it.

Madam Speaker, on the maritime sector, there remains a lot of issues to be resolved. Recent occurrences whereby passengers and fishing vessels have experienced hiccups out at sea, increases the awareness that this is an industry that remains at high risk for disaster. Therefore, it is prudent that the MSAF be well-equipped with necessary vessels and equipment to provide proper monitoring and clearance for the seaworthiness of vessels.

Madam Speaker, it is disappointing to note the many foreign vessels and fishing boats that are running aground in Fiji waters for whatever reasons that may be. Again we re-emphasize the importance of MSAF and the Fiji Ports Authority in clearing vessels to enter into Fiji waters. Madam Speaker, Fiji being a maritime island, demands we provide our people with safe and affordable travelling opportunities, especially where people can travel in safety with mass cargo. It will be imperative that this industry is also boosted with a few more vessels that government can invest in, to complement the current vessels operating in our waters.

The franchise scheme of government is not enough. To fully capitalize on our economic opportunities in our islands, we have to increase government's support to the private sector players who are engaged in the shipping industries. Madam Speaker, on the provision of electricity, this is a basic commodity that every home needs. We note that the government has provided for \$61.2

million in the budget for rural electrification and a booklet has been provided listing all the areas expected to be connected to the electricity grid in 2018 and 2019.

Madam Speaker, as I have raised earlier in this House, there are residents of the Sasawira, Veisari, Veiraisi, and Navasa Villages in Nabua, are still crying for the provision of electricity to their homes since 2014. They have been requesting through the Ministry and their respective assistant line ministers, however, to-date nothing has materialised, most of them voted for FijiFirst in 2014, with this year around, it might change.

The people of Navasa, for example, have lived in this settlement for the last 50 years, Madam Speaker, and I note that those three settlements mentioned, for example, do not form part of the electrification list in last year's Budget and again in this new Budget.

Madam Speaker, why go and promise electricity to nearby settlements when even we have come close to the end of Parliament term and still they have yet to see the promises become a reality. Likewise the Villages of Waisa, Naterumai, Waisere, Vatudavila up in Naitasiri are not on these rural listings and yet I have raised their requests through this august House consistently over the years.

That is the reality of things, Madam Speaker, that this Government just uses people when they need to. They do not really care about Fijian families because a SODELPA government will ensure that electricity will be provided to homes all over Fiji and we will not be discriminatory.

Madam Speaker, I stood in this august House in the last sitting and queried the allocation of shares to resource owners from where electricity is sourced. Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the Government that our resource owners have been accommodative for so long. The land on which the Monasavu Dam sits was given by landowners to be used for the benefit of the nation. However, as time goes by, its commercial benefits has reaped and made billions in revenue for government over the years. The least that government can do is to offer them more shares than the rest of the Fijian citizens.

According to the Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) executives, the resource owners have been paid water royalties which now stands at a rate of 60cents per kilowatt hour for both Monasavu and Nadarivatu.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I just want to point out to the Honourable Minister for Economy, that in one of our debates as well in the last sitting regarding the Fair Share of Mineral Royalty Act, he had ridiculed that water is not a mineral. But let me now state the facts, yes, it is. Water is used in the generation of power has been acknowledged as mineral and is thus being compensated as confirmed by EFL.

No wonder, the Honourable Minister was wrong, Madam Speaker, because this royalty payment started way back since the days of the Alliance Government.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

I beg your indulgence, Shadow Minister but we need to invite the Honourable Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea to make his speech now to Parliament, and you will continue. We will give you exactly the same time, thank you.

Honourable Members, we are honoured to have the Prime Minister for Papua New Guinea here with us this morning, and now we will now invite him to speak to the House. You may have the floor, Sir.

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE PETER O'NEILL –
PRIME MINISTER OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

HON. P. O'NEILL.- Thank you, The Honourable Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, Dr. Jiko Luveni; the Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, Prime Minister Bainimarama; Ministers of State; Members of Parliament; and Members of the Diplomatic Corp: I thank you very much for giving me this honour of addressing you here today. It is always a great pleasure to be visiting your lovely country. The warm hospitality of your people and government makes our delegation very much at home. Again, it is indeed an honour to address you in this Honourable House today. I know Papua New Guinea is only the second country to be accorded this honour, and I greatly appreciate that.

Papua New Guinea is a friend of Fiji. We thank you that we are also Melanesian brothers. We have close bilateral partnership. The friendship between Fiji and Papua New Guinea continues to grow even stronger each year. Together, we are moving forward into building relationships, both in trade and investment, social engagement between our peoples, and there is the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. That has been established by our forefathers many, many years ago.

Our relationship remains very vibrant. As I have stated earlier, trade and investment continue to grow. There are more and more companies from both countries investing in both countries in many areas, such as hotels, banks, agriculture, and again we want to strengthen this engagement with your lovely country.

We want to increase our partnership arrangements and, of course, strengthen our collective position on many issues. The global political economy as we live today is experiencing a lot challenges, both in terms of geopolitics and, of course, trade and investments that are being very competitive across the global markets.

We, as Melanesians and Pacific island nations, must work together, simply by getting on and doing what is best for our own countries, but also for the region. It is, therefore, important that we continue to build a strong bond between our two countries and of course our sub regional and regional organisations.

Forums such as the Melanesians Spearhead Group (MSG) and, of course, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), where Fiji is a leader in many of these regional organisations, we must continue to work together. High level exchanges between our countries must be deepened even further. We, as Melanesians, while we may be small in population compared to the rest of the world but we are stronger working together.

There are many issues, where we do not have much choice, but in fact by working together we can make a difference in our region and in our countries. There is probably no greater challenge confronting Papua New Guinea and Fiji, and of course the wider Pacific community. The dangers caused by climate change is a reality. PNG and our other members of the region greatly appreciates Fiji's leadership on this issue.

Fiji's central role at COP23 in Bonn, Germany, is again is an example where the right approach is needed to take the leadership role and making sure that our concerns are aided by the global communities. Many of the Pacific Island nations did not cause this problem, but the threats we face today are real. Real is the sense that it continues to affect many of our communities by events, such as cyclones that we are experiencing.

The long droughts that we experience in PNG is hurting our people, hurting our economies. Extreme weather conditions lead to many destructions and it is just getting worse every year. That is why the leadership that is being provided by Fiji is very important, when we continue to monitor the changes in oceans temperatures and water movements that are destroying many of our fish stock and certainly in PNG we are amongst the first of climate change refugees. Our people in the Carteret Islands in Bouganville have seen their houses and gardens washed away by many of the tidal waves that we are experiencing.

They have to leave their homes that has been what they call, “homes for thousands of years” and have been resettled in other parts of our country. This is simply not fair. It is not fair to the villages in Fiji, not fair to anyone in the Pacific. That is why it is important that we act together, because if we do not stand up for ourselves, we cannot expect other countries to stand up for us.

As a group of countries together, and as developing nations, both from Africa to the Caribbean and the Pacific must work together. We have to maintain the pressure that we have to do in the industrialised countries so that they can continue to reduce their emissions. We have to start to reverse the climate change say, for safety of our communities, and of course the health for our future generations.

We are in this together as Pacific brothers and sisters, we must stand side by side, so that the rest of the world can take notice of our concerns. PNG, again, fully supports Fiji’s leadership through the *Talanoa* Dialogue, that has been facilitated through the Climate Action Partnership, which is the concerns of the Pacific introversion. In terms of our multi-lateral relations, we must also work and act together, particularly through agencies like the United Nations.

Papua New Guinea is again fully supporting Fiji’s bid for the representation at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Fiji has a unique and great experience in the UN Forums, particularly when it comes to peacekeeping missions. On that note, let me take this opportunity to congratulate Fiji on its 40th Anniversary of the International Peacekeeping Missions. Fijian Military personnel have saved many lives across the world and their efforts must be commended.

Also, labour mobility is another area of shared interest between our two countries. We have seen many of our professionals worked and lived within our two countries, particularly when it comes to an area such as healthcare, education and public service. There is much to be gained from the experience that each of us have, and we must continue to ensure that our people travel freely and work among our countries in the future.

There are also economic similarities between our two countries, that is that we need to advance our economic opportunities so that we can advance development in our respective countries. More importantly, our Governments must have a very clear focus on building and strengthening the infrastructure which leads to development of our countries.

In Papua New Guinea today, we are building more and more roads, more airports, more seaports, more colleges and university campuses than ever before. We have to keep providing the infrastructure that is needed for our business to grow and our people to prosper. I am very, very impressed with the infrastructure development that has been taking place in your country in recent years. There is a lot for us to discuss and share the experiences we have, so again, we can continue to advance the lives of our people.

Ultimately, we must expand our free trade and investment between our two countries which is central to economic development of any nation. Trade and investments between our countries are growing, but it could be better. I would like to explore the possibility over a free trade agreement

between our two countries, so that we can take advantage of these strengths, and collective strength that we have in our respective economies. I propose that the two countries look at the free trade agreement and I leave this to our officials to discuss this as we move forward.

But let me again say that Papua New Guinea is going to host the APEC 2018 in November. APEC is a forum member of 21 economies, that includes the United States, China, Japan, Australia, Russia and many of them, are the largest global economies. They account for half of the global trade, more than half of the global GDP.

It is an enormous trading bloc and it provides enormous opportunities for many of other countries in the region. APEC in Papua New Guinea is an opportunity for Pacific Island nations, and in particular PNG and Fiji to make sure that we improve our linkages between the APEC economies. As the only Pacific Island nation in the APEC community, it was our time to host the APEC leaders meeting.

We are ensuring that this APEC leaders meeting is a truly Pacific one, that is that Asia must know where the Pacific is and Asia must know the vulnerabilities of the Pacific that we live in. We still have the highest level of APEC security being provided to all our visiting leaders. In that extent, we have extended the invitation to all the leaders in the Pacific to come and join us for this meeting, and I want to also extend the invitation to our Prime Minister for Fiji to address our CEO Summit which will be attended by close to 9,000 delegates from all over the world.

The APEC will be more relaxed in a Pacific style but it will continue to maintain the relevance of the agenda that is before us. APEC forum offers a great deal to its members, particularly to develop economies like ours and it is an opportunity for us to build capacity and take advantage of the programmes that are being offered by the APEC community.

There is a substantive agenda list in that, that is going to be discussed. These include many areas such as forestry, agriculture, fisheries, transportation, SME businesses, as well as emergency preparedness and counter-terrorism security issues. In each of these activities, it is advanced, as trying to build capacity and making sure that the information that we share between member economies can be experienced, and of course the theme is: "To Harness Inclusive Opportunities, Embracing The Digital Future Of Our Global Community".

That is that it will improve connectivity between our economies. Connectivity for our people and making sure that we promote sustainable and inclusive growth within the region. This is a great opportunity for the Pacific, making sure that the Asian economies know the opportunities that are available in the Pacific region. The theme is very important because it will lead to growth; it will lead to connectivity, and making sure that we take advantage of the digital technologies that will be the catalyst for growth into the future.

Importantly, the 2018 APEC in Papua New Guinea is to ensure that we leave no one behind. Our region has been experiencing economic growth but we must make sure that this growth is inclusive. We have to create opportunities for small businesses to expand. We must make sure that education is available to our population.

At its core, APEC remains a forum for liberalising trade and investment across the region. It has experienced substantial growth because APEC communities have removed all trading barriers so that there is free flow of trade and investment between each APEC economy, which also leads to job growth within those markets.

PNG today is halfway between hosting the 2018 APEC and this is a challenging environment for PNG, especially given the global challenges in global trade with a rise in inflation faced by many of its member economies, but so far Papua New Guinea has been able to develop a consensus statement on regional trade at the ministerial level.

Currently, in terms of the global arena, this is the only statement that everyone has agreed to. There has been lack of ability of the European Union Ministers and the Group of Seven (G7) to produce a statement on free global trade this year.

Commencing 4th August, 2018, a third round of Senior Officials Meeting will take place in Port Moresby. This will be followed by a high level of Ministerial Meetings in finance, mining and women in economy, providing again opportunities for the Pacific to participate at these ministerial forums. I again extend the invitation to all our ministers who wish to participate in this arena, you are most welcome to do so.

The conclusion of the APEC here will be at the Leaders' Summit in November, attended by Prime Ministers and Presidents of all the APEC economies. The APEC Leaders' Week will be including all the Foreign Affairs and Trade Ministers and more importantly, the APEC CEOs Summit. A total of around 9,000 government officials and business leaders will be in Port Moresby, so this is an opportunity for the Pacific businesses, governments and countries to have an active involvement and discussions about the opportunities that lie ahead of us.

That is why I have invited all the leaders of the PIF Members to attend the APEC. Obviously Australia, New Zealand and PNG are the only members who are attending, but I want PIF Leaders and the countries to be active participants in this meeting. As I have said, APEC is not only about Asia, it is also about the Pacific. It is important that we highlight that to all the other leaders who are coming from Russia, Mexico and rest of the Pacific Rim, so that they know that there exists a large community across this huge ocean of ours.

I have also extended invitation to your Prime Minister and your Government to participate as the President of China, His Excellency Xi Jinping will be on a State Visit to PNG in the days before the Leaders' Summit. He has extended an opportunity to meet with the Pacific Island countries, especially those who have One-China Policy towards the relationship that they manage with the Chinese Government. That is why the Honourable Prime Minister and the Members of this Honourable House, this is an historic occasion for PNG.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you here. PNG has a true friend in Fiji. I can assure you that we will continue to work together so that we can advance the interests of our people. We want to continue to develop and of course, continue to deliver growth and it is very important that we continue to improve the living standards of our people. These can be only done through partnership and goodwill of both our people and our countries.

Thank you and may God bless Fiji and may God bless PNG. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister of the Independent State of Papua New

Guinea, we thank you very much indeed for your address; a very encouraging address that you have delivered this morning. I will now invite our Honourable Prime Minister to escort you for refreshment. Thank you.

(Honourable Peter O'Neill was escorted out of the Chamber by the Honourable Prime Minister)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, you may be seated.

Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy, Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you may continue with your presentation and you can take all the time to complete it.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2018-2019 APPROPRIATION BILL 2018

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, regarding the royalty payment, if this Government was genuine in caring for the Fijian families, it would give the resource owners at Monasavu and other landowning units where electricity towers stand, an opportunity to enjoy a bigger portion of EFL shares, say 500 shares per individual.

We are aware that recently, the Fiji Government facilitated a similar arrangement partnership with investor, Aqua Pacific. We are not asking for something out of ordinary, Madam Speaker, in fact it will be prudent for Government to advocate such partnership with resource owners, not only from Naitasiri but elsewhere like the upper Namosi and Ba Rivers.

We know that Government has set an ambitious target of achieving 90 percent renewable energy by 2030. So for that to be realised, Government will require more land to enable these projects to be done, so this arrangement will entice landowners to engage in such activities. A SODELPA Government will review and recognise a longstanding goodwill relationship and understanding of resource owners and entice them for commercial partnership arrangements as mentioned.

On education, Madam Speaker, there is an allocation of over \$1 billion. It is no secret that one of the unhappiest lots in the Civil Service at present are teachers. Following the implementation of the new contracts under the reform system, many of them enjoyed slighter increases in their salaries. However, a lot of confusion came after; people had their acting appointments, for example, confirmed, only to be later asked to reapply for all the positions. For example, in Ra, 33 Head Teacher positions had been advertised, however, there are people in those positions already confirmed. The people affected are now worried and confused.

Madam Speaker, likewise the Head Teachers' acting allowance, ever since the beginning of the year, they have yet to be paid their acting allowances. What kind of bullish arrangements are these? With the kind of environment of fear we are operating in, these poor teachers have asked not to be named. They fear being victimised Madam Speaker.

There are also teachers from all over Fiji, Madam Speaker, especially in the maritime zones and those in interior and rural schools, who signed contracts last year and they received pay increases following that. However this year, at least \$400 is being deducted from their pay without any proper explanations. These teachers, when inquiring, had been given lame reasoning and because they have families to support, they have now accepted their fate, Madam Speaker. They have sent me this information so that it can be highlighted in this House, the lies and the injustices people are being exposed to.

The sad thing is, Madam Speaker, just as we have heard other Civil Service Reform instances, teachers have had to readjust their lives with some receiving as low as \$18 in their pay packets because following their new contracts, they had made personal commitments. The advertising of positions afterwards, resulting in acting allowances being ceased for example, has affected their commitments accordingly.

It is inhumane anyway, to expect people to act in positions doing jobs and signing contracts for these acting jobs, only to have them readvertised and losing out in some instances, or being delayed for as much as four to five months, as they await confirmation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is laughable to see the mention of teachers' quarters for rural areas. Timely announcement, given it is Elections year! But, of course, how long it will take for those quarters to materialise, we can only guess.

The Ministry of Health's Budget has been set at \$335 million; again, the bulk of this allocation is allocated to operating expenditure.

The Honourable Minister for Economy has revealed that Government is setting up a new sector. This will be a private General Practitioners Sector in Fiji. It is being meant to ease the burden of travelling all the way to Health Centres. These GPs will be located in communities within residential areas. All costs of consultations for the general public at the GPs will be borne by Government.

Madam Speaker, it again all sounds good, but when checking the Budget Book and Supplementary Summary, it is not very clear how much this will cost the taxpayers of this nation.

The Honourable Minister has stated that the first trial for this service will roll out in January 2019. Can the Honourable Minister provide details of his plans and the related costs that goes with it? Otherwise, this is another big announcement initiative, just like the Civil Service OMRS, that is turning out to be a mess.

Madam Speaker, on agriculture, I know there is a lot of revolution being talked about in this House and I know that the agriculture sector production and exports have been on the decline for a number of years, but this is a crucial industry in Fiji that needs to regain as it used to be one of our mainstays.

Since the downward trend in sugar as Fiji's main export earner, no other agricultural product has been able to attract the same kind of successful status. We note that this sector has been provided \$96 million and we continue to urge Government to consider other non-sugar commodities to invest in, and support in a big way.

Commodities, like *dalo*, *yaqona*, ginger, beef and dairy can be good buffers for the ailing sugar industry. Those commodities, if supported with an equal kind of assistance being offered to sugar, we are of the view that we will be able to find alternative winning products to market as exports. If Government can offer a Sugar Stabilization Fund which is expected to pay a base price of \$85 per tonne in principle, why can we not do the same for other non-sugar products?

Madam Speaker, we understand the low productivity challenges and the mill breakdowns faced by the Sugar Industry. However, it would be imperative that Government acknowledges that the non-sugar sector also face huge challenges and are in desperate need for similar assistance as sugar has been provided.

Madam Speaker, on another note, under the new initiatives, Government has provided \$1.2 million for the establishment of the Fiji Goat Industry. This is mindboggling, Madam Speaker. It defeats a very simple purpose that we are trying to champion through COP23.

Goats, Madam Speaker, are detrimental to the environment. It has been scientifically proven that they devour anything and everything, including soil. If Government wanted to invest seriously in the agriculture sector, there are many other options. Why not invest in sheep or the beef industry or any other crops, like cocoa or the banana industry?

Madam Speaker, goat is a very strange choice. Why not horses? Perhaps, we should encourage the Honourable Minister for Economy to appreciate horses. They are a very useful animal, Madam Speaker, and can be very supportive to environmental preservation. We can use them as alternative transport means, and to cure our headache traffic jams.

Madam Speaker, it is sad that the Honourable Minister, who may know the nitty-gritty of horses with his close association to the Sigatoka horse town of Fiji, chose goats, instead of horses. Maybe, we can encourage someone from Ra to help convince us all which of those two animals is the lesser of the two evils, Madam Speaker, when it comes to environmental preservation and useful commodity.

Madam Speaker, I must briefly mention the dairy industry. Farmers of this industry in Naitasiri are still awaiting the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's update on the request made to his good-self in Vunidawa in 2014. They still await their request in increase in milk gate prices which stands at 80 cents for a majority of farmers, who have faithfully continued their involvement in this industry since childhood. We understand that some dairy farmers are getting \$1 per litre of milk at gate prices, so it would only be fair to allow everyone to enjoy the same.

Madam Speaker, we note that Government continues to allocate a sum of \$1 million to the Fiji Dairy Co-operative Limited to cover milk cartage from farms to chilling centres and fodder development. This is supposed to assist dairy farmers boost their milk production and help the industry in Fiji.

The dairy farmers are questioning the allocation of \$3 million for free milk, as they have not felt the trickledown effect of this. There are suggestions, Madam Speaker, that some of the cartons of milk being given out to schools are discarded because of expiry dates. This is perhaps, an exercise of wastage and raises the real intent of this Government's expenditure.

Madam Speaker, a SODELPA government will be genuine to farmers and ensure they are supported with better milk prices and will be properly stocked with milking cows to increase milk production.

On the Forestry budget provision, timber production has been on a downward decline in the last three years. There is very little indication that Government is serious about this sector with only two reforestation provisions budgeted at less than \$1 million.

Of the \$17.1 million allocated, \$12.6 million is going to operating expenditure. Madam Speaker, the Budget fails to reveal any major investment into this industry, but my colleague will discuss more on that later.

As for my analysis on this industry, I would like to focus on the Fijian Mahogany Industry. Unfortunately, I do not see any budgetary allocation directed to this industry specifically and this is

disappointing. Madam Speaker, it has become notable that the ongoing mismanagement by Government has severely undermined the potential of the industry to the point where it is becoming unviable.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's international reputation as a mahogany supplier has fallen very low and Government has to assume the responsibility of that decrease. It has now been almost two years of no serious logging and the mahogany industry is in extremely poor shape.

Madam Speaker, we have been informed that it took Government via Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) and the Mahogany Industry Council (MIC) 12 months to complete a simple tender process. During this period, no logs were harvested. In the process, there was no urgency shown to maintain markets with any continuity of supply. In fact, there was almost no log supply for many months preceding the announcement of a re-tender.

Madam Speaker, the FHCL and Government had made a big deal of restructuring or resetting the industry, prior to issuance of the current licences. However, the MIC decided to make some variations to the tender requirements and the process of how logs could be sold by FHCL. In the event, licenced buyers reneged on purchasing their awarded volumes. Deliberations of this simple matter took close to a year to complete, Madam Speaker. It should have taken no more than 60 days under any normal commercial settings.

Madam Speaker, because of this indecisiveness, mills were not supplied with the expected mahogany to log. As a result, there were no income for staff and so many were laid off. What is worse is that international consumers have been left high and dry, and yet, there had been no explanation forthcoming from Government.

Madam Speaker, the stakeholders of this industry are today suffering. Landowners are not receiving proper royalty. Business operators are not making any money on their licences, and they have been burning cash in the last two years as they await Government to get this industry sorted out.

Madam Speaker, it must be noted that the log prices set by FHCL are beyond the capability of the Fiji processing industry. In general, most Fijian hardwood sawmills are in poor shape, well below the minimum standard required to become viable producers of internationally accepted quality timber products.

The improvements and additional plants required to achieve this actually cost millions of dollars. So that would not be happening, at least, not with individual licences of less than 15,000m³ of log supply per annum. The investment in required plant and equipment could not be supported.

Madam Speaker, only one mill has a licence for 15,000m³ standards set. Therefore, most licence holders are very limited to a very narrow market segment. That is, being suppliers of low quality, inaccurately cut, semi/crudely-processed mahogany timber.

International buyers are few and prices are around 100 percent to 150 percent lower than fully processed quality products. Therefore, the prices set by FHCL relate to the higher quality products that cannot be produced by most mills. It is beyond their capabilities. This destines the industry to failure.

Madam Speaker, a total of \$69.9 million has been allocated to cover the Ministry of Waterways and Environment commitments. This is expected to address the issue of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

My brief comment on this allocation is on the Naboro Landfill Stage 2 budget which has been set at \$3.3m.

The allocation as explained by Government is to increase the lifespan of the Landfill by an additional two years. We believe that spending \$3.3 million just to extend the lifespan for an additional two years is not sustainable and not economically viable.

To address the problem at Naboro Landfill, extending the lifespan of the Landfill is not the answer. Mandating waste separation from the household level through Municipal Councils would be more feasible, thus Government must work to support households to do so.

The rubbish bins giveaway by Government has been noted. Perhaps, they can also provide incentives to companies that sell rubbish bins, so they can sell them at more affordable prices as well, Madam Speaker, and the Municipal Councils conduct house to house visits to create awareness for families to adopt more environment-friendly management would be better use of taxpayers' money.

Madam Speaker, on river bank erosion that occur along major rivers, the two cyclones *TC Josie* and *TC Gita* had exposed the need to manage this challenge. Excessive flooding was experienced whereby small creeks and streams became rivers that engulfed properties. Government needs to address this area urgently and a proper budgetary allocation would be meaningful as a mitigation and adaptation plan for affected areas.

To end Madam Speaker, I am aware this is the last time I get an opportunity to respond in this august House on the National Budget.

It has been a great journey in the last four years. I am convinced that Government has paid some attention to the issues the Opposition side raises. I urge them to also consider all the contributions that will be made from this side of the House on the 2018-2019 Budget. .

On that note, I now wish to thank your good self, Secretary-General to Parliament, Parliamentary staff and the Committee secretariat for all your hard work during this Parliamentary term. It is greatly appreciated.

To all Honourable Members of Parliament, personally it has been an inspiring term. We have made some new friends on both sides of the House and we have made some great debates. Gloves have been worn and taken off on certain occasions, but I trust we all understand that this is for the greater good of our nation.

I, therefore, thank you all and for those of you vying for a return to this House, I wish you the very best. To my voters and supporters and to the *Vanua Vakaturaga o' Naitasiri* and my campaign team, to my family and friends, thank you most sincerely for the endless support and prayers. I wish you all the very best and I pray that God will continue to grant us His grace always for a peaceful and prosperous Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu* and may God Bless us all and God bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Shadow Minister for Economy for his response to the Budget.

The Parliament will now be adjourned for us to have refreshment and we will return at 12.00 p.m. Thank you Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.16 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 12.00 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, you may be seated.

I now call on the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Service to have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery and those watching this proceedings from the comfort of their homes; *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good afternoon to you all.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support to endorse and commend the 2018-2019 Budget that was presented by the Honourable Minister for Economy on Thursday, 28th June, 2018.

Madam Speaker, the Budget presented is a Budget built for every Fijian family everywhere in Fiji because for us, all Fijian families matter.

Madam Speaker, as the Minister for Health and Medical Services, I warmly welcome the Budget and thank the Honourable Minister for my Ministry's allocation for 2018-2019. On that note, I would also like to thank our Honourable Prime Minister for his visionary leadership in promoting unity and an inclusive society for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, since its announcement, the 2018-2019 Budget has received widespread praises and has been widely welcomed by the general public.

Madam Speaker, it is a progressive Budget as it incorporates strategic policy innovations and new initiatives that is uniquely targeted towards the empowerment of all our Fijian families. This Budget is built on the achievements of the past and it should be viewed in totality which signifies our Government's comprehensive approach for national development.

Madam Speaker, coming back to the Honourable Shadow Minister's address this morning, I would like to thank the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy for his lengthy address.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Shadow Minister's delivery alluded as if all was gloom and doom in Fiji for all Fijians. I urge the Honourable Member to remove his tinted shades to see and recognise the realities that exist in Fiji today; prosperity and progress.

Madam Speaker, Fijians are happier more than ever before. Fijians are secure more than ever before.

Madam Speaker, we are united and resilient more than ever before.

Madam Speaker, we are progressing more than ever before.

Madam Speaker, the reasons for me saying that, we have a Government that really cares and understands the needs of our people. We have a Government that has policies and initiatives that includes every Fijian because for us, every Fijian matters.

Madam Speaker, we have a Government for whom it is all about people. This Government is committed to serving all Fijians and this Government is all about fulfilling their promises and putting policies into action.

Madam Speaker, our people know that the future of Fijians is now more rosier than before.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Madam Speaker, coming back to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services 2018-2019 Budget, it is clearly aligned with my Ministry's vision for building a healthy nation through developing healthy Fijian families by empowering Fijians at all levels of health care and services.

The total allocation in the 2018-2019 Budget for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is \$335 million. This comprises of a \$260 million allocation for Operating Expenditure and \$60.5 million for Capital Expenditure and of course VAT of \$14.5 million.

Madam Speaker, there is a total of 6,363 staff who administer our three divisional hospitals, 19 subdivisional health facilities, two specialised hospitals (St Giles and PJ Twomey Hospital), a total of 86 health centres and 100 nursing stations. The Operating Expenditure budget will meet both medical and non-medical expenses.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report to the Honourable Members of this august House that through the 2018-2019 Budget, the Government has delivered an increase of FJ\$13.9 million. That reflects on the Government's significant investment to upgrade and expand our existing health facilities, to construct and equip all our health facilities in Fiji with modern medical equipment and resources.

Madam Speaker, it is also mainly attributed towards an increase in recruitment of new positions of allied and technical staff. These positions will enable us to ensure prevention and treatment of a wide range of illness and health conditions.

Madam Speaker, the increase in funding for hiring of locum doctors, currently we have 31 General Practitioners who work as locums and nine Specialists and they cater for the current demand of shortage of doctors and specialists. There is an increase from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million to hire these locums to practice within our health facilities.

In addition, Madam Speaker, a total of \$47.6 million will be provided by the Ministry of Civil Service to fund the doctors' salaries and training. Therefore, the overall Health Sector Budget amounts to \$382 million.

Madam Speaker, enhancing health care accessibilities has been one of the key strategies for health sector development, as such the introduction of General Practitioners to set up clinics directly in Fijian communities will greatly boost the accessibility of health services to rural and maritime areas. It directly addresses the greater inequalities in the densities of health workers at provincial level compared to the divisional levels in Fiji.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, facilitating General Practitioners Clinics in remote and peri-urban areas significantly increases access to health services for the general population. Equity in access is also improved for the remote or rural peri-urban dwellers, that is, the same service offered at urban areas by General Practitioners will now be made available to the rural population, and of course subsidised by the Government.

Madam Speaker, an important element in achieving this objective is raising the doctor- patient ratio to one doctor per a thousand people as per the World Health Organisation standard. In 2009,

Madam Speaker, the doctor-patient ratio was 0.44 to 1,000 and in 2014 it improved to 0.60 to 1,000 and in 2017 the patient to doctor ratio further enhanced to 0.94 to 1,000. We expect to further improve and maintain this as doctor-patient with the increased number of graduates currently trained in our two medical schools.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed a historic recognition that for the very first time in 40 years of their existence, the network of community health workers are now recognised. Never before, Madam Speaker, did we see this recognition given to our community health workers.

The new allocation in the 2018-2019 Budget of \$4.6 million will go towards increasing the allowances of close to 1,800 community health workers in Fiji who previously received about \$50 per month, now they will be receiving \$200 per month. Through this Madam Speaker, we will be able to strengthen our collaboration between the community health workers and the Ministry to coordinate capacity building and more training opportunities.

The community health workers will also be equipped with basic medication and equipment that will enhance their role to improve the services within their communities. Madam Speaker, at this point, I would like to acknowledge the work carried out by the community health workers as they play a very vital role in terms of health advocacy, health promotion, community profiling, community health mobilisation, basic first aid referrals and follow-up. They are the agents to empower communities, women, children, youths, elders, young and old and they educate and inform them on various health related issues.

Madam Speaker, the Government continues to build on infrastructure developments for the health services that ensures that every Fijian community has efficient accessibility to modernised health facilities that provides them with quality and timely health care. Some of the new facilities that we opened last year includes the Lautoka Emergency Department and the new Operating Theatre, the new Makoi Maternity Unit and the Waimaro Health Centre in Ra which was opened early this year. Madam Speaker, these are modern facilities and they are making significant changes in the lives of the Fijian families who seek health services there.

Madam Speaker, moving onto some other new health facilities for the year, the new Ba Hospital which is the state of the art facility is completed and this has been made possible with the budget of \$34 million provided by the Government. It is expected to be handed over by the end of this month.

Next is our new Nakasi Health Centre which is a Level A Health Centre and has been built with the budget of \$4.1 million. We expect it to be opened and operational by the fourth quarter of this year. Once operational, Madam Speaker, it will provide medical services to the greater Nakasi area and will also ease the load from Valelevu and also Nausori Health Centre.

Madam Speaker, the third project in progress is the extension of the CWM Emergency Department which will create more bed spaces for one of the busiest Emergency Units at our major division hospital here in Suva. It will greatly boost the hospital's capabilities to attend to emergency cases in an efficient way. A total of \$250,000 has been invested into much needed extension services.

Madam Speaker, this new development will no doubt benefit all Fijians to have access to modernised and state-of-the-art health facilities. It will enable our Ministry to intensify our reach out in terms of delivering efficient and quality health services in Fiji that every Fijian truly deserves.

Madam Speaker, the development of health facilities will continue with the 2018-2019 Budget allocation of FJ\$60.5 million for Capital Development within our health sector. This includes:

- \$11 million towards the extension of the new Colonial War Memorial Hospital Maternity Ward which will be the state-of-the-art and first of its kind facility dedicated for the women of Fiji.
- \$11 million allocated towards the construction of the Navua Subdivision Hospital which will serve over 10,000 Fijians in the Nadroga/Navosa Province.
- A sum of \$1 million has been allocated for the construction of the new Lodon Health Centre in Lodon, to ensure high quality health services are delivered and provided.
- \$500,000 has been allocated for the much needed extension of the Korovou Hospital.
- \$3 million to upgrade the Hospital's Operating Theatre and X-ray capabilities at the Lautoka Hospital.
- \$2.5 million towards the upgrade of Valelevu Health Centre to a subdivisional hospital.

Madam Speaker, apart from the infrastructure development, allocations have also been made to accommodate the transportation needs of those Fijian families in the maritime and rural areas. There is an increase allocation of \$500,000 in 2018-2019 Budget. These funds will be directed towards purchase of new boats and outboard motors, repair and maintenance of boats to assist in improving accessibility to primary health care services in those hard to reach places.

Madam Speaker, the 2018-2019 Budget has allocations for the equipping of our health facilities with modern state of the art equipment and technologies that will empower our medical professionals to make accurate diagnosis to ensure clinical accuracy and offer quality treatment.

I am pleased to say that a total of \$9.5 million has been allocated to purchase new dental and biomedical equipment for urban and subdivisional hospitals, and a new MRI machine for CWM Hospital through the \$4 million allocation which means more Fijians will be able to access quality service and it will enable our medical profession to save lives.

Madam Speaker, moving onto the most awaited service and that is the treatment of kidney diseases. Chronic Kidney Diseases, Madam Speaker, affects about 10 percent of the world's population and it is amongst the top 10 causes of deaths in Fiji.

It is a milestone achievement, Madam Speaker, for the very first time for any government to subsidise the cost of kidney dialysis and also to establish the Kidney Dialysis Centre, one in Suva and one in Nadi through an allocation of \$2 million. The new centres will complement the current services provided by privately-run facilities and it will, of course, ensure that there is an increased availability and accessibility of this service to our people.

The National Kidney Research and Treatment Centre is currently in development and its operations will commence in a very near future from a temporary location. Plans are underway to commence the National Peritoneal Dialysis Programme and two of our nurses have been trained in Australia specifically for this Peritoneal Dialysis Treatment.

Madam Speaker, improving accessibility of services available and subsidising the dialysis cost, plus research goes a long way in ensuring equity, accessibility and affordability to our Fijians with Non-Communicable Disease complications. A total of \$3.5 million will be used to subsidise the cost of treatment for patients currently on haemodialysis treatment and \$2 million towards infrastructure and specialised equipment.

It would be for the first time for Fiji to see the dialysis cost being subsidised to \$150 per session, and those with household income under \$30,000 will only pay 50 percent of the treatment cost. This significantly eases the financial load on families and, of course, will significantly reduce the emotional and mental burden that families and patients carry with them from these diseases.

A group of kidney patients visited us last week after the Budget announcement, Madam Speaker, and expressed their heartfelt appreciation to the Government for its swift response and commitment for addressing their much awaited plight.

Madam Speaker, having said that, I would still like to emphasise that dialysis is not a lifestyle option. It is not only costly but also time-consuming. We all need to emphasise to all our Fijians the importance of avoiding NCDs or if they are affected, they need to comply with the treatment regime to avoid their conditions deteriorating. It is possible to live for many years with well-managed diabetes without the need of dialysis.

Madam Speaker, moving on to patients who need specialised medical services that may not be available locally, the Government, through the 2018-2019 Budget, has increased the Overseas Treatment Budget from \$1.3 million to \$2 million for the next financial year. The referral of patients abroad remains an integral part of the services that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services facilitates for all our Fijian families. Patients are referred abroad for treatments that are highly technical and complex in treatment modalities that we presently cannot offer at our hospitals in Fiji by locals or by the visiting medical specialists.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, for the first time, the health needs of people with albinism are being brought out of the shadows and specifically addressed with an allocation of \$60,000 in next year's Health budget. These funds will be used for the purchase of items such as sunscreens to prevent skin cancer for people with albinism and who are not able to afford it.

The Ministry of Health will continue to work with other Ministries and Non-Government Organisations to ensure that no one is left behind and this includes our Fijians living with albinism.

Madam Speaker, the Health Ministry's work in reaching out to Fijians and assisting them to protect them against NCDs and CDs by encouraging every Fijian to lead a healthy lifestyle and seeking to eliminate the risk of unhealthy environment is too rarely acknowledged but it is indeed vital work and the work this budget will enable us to sustain and continue.

A total sum allocated to the Public Health Services in the 2018-2019 Budget is F\$12.7 million. I am pleased to say that it has been increased by \$4.9 million from the 2017-2018 Budget. This includes an increase of \$100,000 for dengue allocation. The Public Health Services allocation will significantly support the ongoing work in many programme areas, and just to highlight three:

1. Enforcement of Tobacco Control;
2. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Aids Prevention Control; and
3. Adolescence Reproductive Health Control.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that the Ministry of Health's ongoing efforts to build a healthier Fiji will be greatly assisted by the 15 percent excise taxes on sugar beverages, alcohol and tobacco. The increased tax on sugar beverages will impact people's choices, we hope, thereby reducing the consumption of sugary drinks that will significantly assist in the prevention of obesity and diabetes. It will also enable families to save money and invest in making much healthier choices.

Madam Speaker, the reduction of import duties from 5 percent to zero percent on imported fruits and vegetables shows our Government's continued unprecedented commitment to reduce the common risk factors associated with NCDs in Fiji. This will extend opportunities for Fijian families to access a variety of fruits and vegetables at a more affordable price. It will also broaden purchasing choices for the consumers and help them increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Investing in a better management of NCDs is critical through proper diagnosis, screening and treatment. These are the key components in our response to our NCDs in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, it is also encouraging to note from the health perspective the increase in paid maternity leave from 84 working days to 98 working days which provides an additional 14 days for mothers to take time off from work in preparation of the birth and the care of the child. The new Maternity Entitlement Leave, Madam Speaker, will further enhance early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding that sets the stage for healthy growth and development of the child and, of course, largely reduces the risk of childhood obesity and diabetes.

Madam Speaker, these policies reflect the Government's compassionate approach to the development and welfare of many Fijian families who hold a special occasion, such as readying of a child to their hearts.

Madam Speaker, moving on, the Ministry's efforts to combat communicable diseases, there are now developments incorporated in the next budget of \$1million for a new modernised facility to be developed for the Fiji Centre for Communicable Disease Control and a total of \$250,000 has also been allocated for the upgrading of the national Public Health Lab at the Fiji Centre for Communicable Disease Control.

Madam Speaker, the Budget provides ongoing funding for Health Customer Care Line which was launched last year. The whole rationale behind this Customer Care Centre is to listen to our people. It shows here that we have a Government that is listening to the voices of our people and we make every effort to have their concerns addressed, and that is the way forward to improving our service delivery.

As for the 2018-2019 Budget, the Free Medicine Programme will continue and this was launched in 2015. A new restructure will allow the retail pharmacies now to procure their own medicines in this programme list and, of course, the Government will reimburse accordingly. This will ease the availability of medicines that will enable our beneficiaries to access the medicines listed. Of course, we have 142 list of medicines that are now provided to all those citizens earning below \$20,000 and at the moment we have 31,000 Fijians who are benefitting from this Free Medicine Programme and we encourage people to take advantage of the continuous free medicine registration drive and register to access to this medicine.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured that the Government has seen fit to support our efforts and those of the many hardworking staff in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services by providing us with a substantial increase in the resources at our disposal.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank and acknowledge all our development partners who have partnered with us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs to take the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I proudly rise today to deliver my own response to Fiji's 2018-2019 Budget. As Prime Minister, I fully recognise that the thoughts which I share in this August Parliament over the next 20 minutes will attract a great deal of attention, and as the leader of the FijiFirst Party, I am also keenly aware that this spotlight shines even brighter during an election year.

Madam Speaker, the words that will be spoken by Members of Parliament today, and throughout the week, will be amplified louder and projected further than any year in Fijian history.

My Government's targeted investments have vastly and permanently expanded telecommunications all throughout Fiji, even in our most deep-rural and maritime communities. Paired with booming economic prosperity that has put technology in the homes and hands of Fijian families throughout our country, our nation's access to information is at an all-time high. But, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, even the proudest of accomplishments can be abused by irresponsible actors; with great access to information can come the great spread of falsehoods.

Madam Speaker, I know that many Fijians put their trust in me, as Prime Minister; to cut through that fog of falsehood to find the truth. Many, Madam Speaker, look to me more than anyone, to provide a straightforward and honest assessment of the state of affairs in Fiji. This humbling responsibility is not one I take lightly, and with more Fijians than ever watching on their TV or smartphone, listening on the radio, and getting news in the papers and online, this is a duty that I very consciously carry on my shoulders this morning.

Madam Speaker, to those Fijians who are seeking my judgment of the 2018-2019 National Budget, it is quite simple: the budget is responsible. Oh, I forgot Madam Speaker, that even the Leader of the Opposition has endorsed the Budget.

(Applause)

You will probably find, Madam Speaker, that she has already changed her mind.

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- One thing that the Opposition is well-known for is their inconsistency in everything they talk about, but this is a Budget, Madam Speaker, that will move our nation forward. This is a Budget for all Fijian families. By the breadth of my experience, and through the wisdom this experience has blessed me with, I can say this with full confidence because, Madam Speaker, this is not a one-off Budget during an election year. It is all part of my Government's visionary plan. It is one building block on top of the great pillar of progress that we have already constructed.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, has been expertly engineered by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy to further raise the quality of life for Fijians of all ages today, while also preparing our nation for tomorrow. I applaud the hard work and many gruelling hours put in, not only by him, but by all those who contributed to ensuring this Budget was carefully crafted, from the public and private sector input but most especially from his staff - the Permanent Secretary for Economy and her officials. It is a remarkable achievement that we should all be proud of.

Madam Speaker, when it comes to putting together a Budget or running an economy, the moral compass of any government should be guided by one defining virtue, and that is responsibility. This is a theme at the core of my remarks today; it is how we can distinguish whether politicians are governing for their people, or governing for themselves. It is the difference between long-sighted leadership and short-sighted spinelessness because, Madam Speaker, true leaders are concerned with preserving prosperity far after they have gone. False leaders are concerned only with preserving themselves.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to address the criticisms of the Opposition head-on. First, it is important to note that valid and fair critiques of Government are invaluable to a democracy. They ensure that our elected officials remain self-aware and accountable, and they can add constructive perspective that better informs our policy and decision-making. Meanwhile, Madam Speaker, there is a fundamental difference between criticism that is just, versus the blatant and desperate lies that we have seen coming from the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, the worst offender is the Leader of SODELPA, Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- He is the Leader of SODELPA.

In a desperate bid to reclaim power, he has quickly resorted to spreading falsehoods as his only political strategy, and that is the only political strategy that he knows of. It would seem that the only truth that has come out of Rabuka's mouth in recent weeks was when just last week, he described his own Party Leader in Parliament as "irresponsible" ...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ... and as SODELPA's infighting only seems to get worse, Fijians

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the Leader of SODELPA, Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka is not in the House

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- So?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... and should not be brought up in the manner that the Honourable Prime Minister has said in his response and should concentrate on the Budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is the point of order?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I did allow the mention of the Leader of SODELPA at this time because what is being said is already in the media and everyone knows about it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes. It represents your policies, it is your policy.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will give extra time.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Now, we are talking about the Budget. Madam Speaker, I want to say, if Rabuka wants to see the height of irresponsibility, he needs only to look into a mirror. The lies that he tells, his falsehoods are intentionally designed to confuse and scare the public.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

(Acclamations)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- A prime example of this, Madam Speaker, is when he chose to lie in front of the world on an Australian News Programme, a calculated move that he hoped would make Fiji look foolish and weak, all for his own celebrity and political benefit.

In his typical dramatic fashion, he declared to the cameras that Fiji risked “selling our souls” by handing over control of Government assets, like our ports and jetties to the Chinese.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No understanding of finance.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- But as it turns out, Madam Speaker, the real assets being handed over are Rabuka’s. You did not hear that *Turaga na i talalatala!*

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We learned just last week, Madam Speaker, that he himself sold off his personal estate in Vanua Levu to a Chinese businessman.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, you cannot make this stuff up! But while we may laugh, no one should see his irresponsible lies and hypocrisy as comical; Fijians need to see this behaviour for what it truly is. It is a pattern, it is outrageous and dangerous.

While Rabuka’s sensualisation makes headlines, it certainly does not make good leadership. If SODELPA knew a single thing about responsible fiscal management, they would know that Fiji stands absolutely no risk of losing our economic independence to China or to Japan, or to any other country for that matter that they try to use for their fear-mongering tactics.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Attorney-General has pointed out, we actually have a profit or operating surplus, taking in more revenue than we spend, when it comes to the day-to-day running of Government. Every extra dollar we take, it is spent on capital investment for the benefit for our people which is then complemented by strategic loans for further capital projects. Absolutely every dollar, every dollar borrowed by Government, is used to invest back into our people.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We use it for infrastructure spending, we use it for climate adaptation, expanding education, and providing medical services. If we were not to do this, our people would suffer and Fiji would forever remain underdeveloped, left behind in a global economy.

Recognising the need for this infrastructure spending, international institutions and financial experts have praised our Budget as responsible.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIARAMA.- Just last week, ANZ International Economist, Kishti Sen, said that our continued growth streak is remarkable ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ... especially considering how often we are hit with economically-devastating tropical cyclones like *TC Winston* which cost over \$1 billion in damages.

These international bodies from ANZ to World Bank to IMF and Moody's, are not driven by a political agenda; they are driven by objective facts. And that is a concern, Madam Speaker, because this morning the Honourable Aseri Radrodro talked about this side of the House, especially the Honourable Minister for Economy, manipulating the figures. The figures are taken from IMF, the Reserve Bank and World Bank, I do not know where they pluck their figures from. I hope it is not from under the table somewhere, because that seems to be the norm with the Opposition.

But Madam Speaker, when you look at the charts, one factor stands out as having an even more devastating effect on the Fijian economy than cyclones. That factor is Sitiveni Rabuka. The Fijian economy suffered its biggest blow in history after his 1987 *coups*. It contracted by 6.4 percent. Yet Rabuka chooses to manipulate Fiji's statistics to his advantage, with flippant disregard for the facts. But Madam Speaker, while desperate politicians may lie, numbers do not.

The false economic figures that Rabuka touts are, at best, a gross manipulation. He openly brags that the Fijian economy grew by 4.2 percent under SVT leadership. Meanwhile, when you do the math, the average growth during full years that SVT was in power, the rate stands at only around half of what he claims, 2.3 percent. I think, Madam Speaker, he should stop relying on bad economic advice from second-rate former civil servants.

Madam Speaker, SODELPA's economic ignorance extends further, as they spread misinformation about Fiji's inflation rate. Rabuka has suggested that our domestic inflation is somehow out of control, harming the purchasing power of Fijians. Again, this is a flat lie. His shameless hypocrisy is exposed again, as SODELPA campaigns for an immediate jump to a \$4 minimum wage with no regard for the inflation it would ignite. Where did \$4 even come from? Between this and NFP's \$5 proposed wage, the Opposition seems to be pulling numbers out of thin air, with no regard to the 130,000 Fijians working in the informal sector and consequential inflationary impact.

But like when it comes to selling assets to the Chinese, Rabuka need not look farther than his own back yard to find the real truth. His irresponsible actions and terrible economic mismanagement are the single biggest contributor to domestic inflation that Fiji has ever seen.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, after he executed his *coups* in 1987, the Fijian dollar was hit with two large devaluations, draining the pockets of Fijian families everywhere. And a third devaluation came under his SVT regime in 1998. Combined, the three Rabuka currency devaluations wiped off more than half the value of the Fijian dollar. To the many ordinary Fijians

who saw their life savings go up in smoke, this, combined with the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji during his time, will go down in our nation's history as Fiji's single largest financial disaster.

And now, Honourable Radrodro is talking about changing the performance of the FNPF, which will kill the FNPF. He does not know. He knows little about what the FNPF does.

Madam Speaker, SODELPA's chorus of lies is joined by Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party, as they are all guilty of manipulating facts to mislead you to think that the poverty rate in Fiji stands at around 50 percent. This distortion is despicable.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The reality is that poverty has been on the steady decline over the past decade, shrinking from 35 per cent, to 31 per cent, to 28 per cent in 2014. A new survey will be conducted this year, with all signs pointing to that rate to continue its downward trend, and while the backdated survey that the Opposition selectively quotes, their scare tactics completely ignore the significant economic progress that Fiji has achieved in recent years.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To suggest that poverty is on the rise when, every day, we see more Fijians joining the job market and buying homes and cars is blind to the reality of our ongoing progress.

And sadly, Madam Speaker, these are just the lies that the Opposition is willing to say publicly; but behind a bowl of grog, or disguised by a fake profile on *Facebook*, their true character is exposed. We know that when certain parties are off-the-record and trying to win votes with fear instead of facts, the lies are much uglier, much more toxic, and much more openly racist and religiously chauvinistic.

Madam Speaker, when their lies about the Budget or Fiji's economic performance fail to gain any traction, the Opposition seems to rely on a common fall-back: rambling on about "hand-outs" to anyone who cares to listen. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, thinks he can see far into the future, Madam Speaker, because he had already labelled this year's Budget as a package of hand-outs long before it was announced.

I would like to put an end to this, Madam Speaker. If the out-of-touch Opposition would take the time to look up from their plate of buttered lamb chops and beer ...

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ...and actually see the needs of Fijian families, they would realise that calling Government's initiatives "hand-outs" is an insult to Fijian families. It is an insult to Fijian families to call Government initiatives as hand-outs, it is irresponsible and it is wrong.

Madam Speaker, as our critics are speaking to a camera or typing behind a computer screen, it is both cowardly and irresponsible for them to portray Fijians who receive assistance as lazy, as less than, or as dependent on Government's treat. But I have a feeling that if they visit with Fijian families face-to-face, their tone would quickly change.

I understand, Madam Speaker, there were some cakes shared last night. It was Honourable Gavoka's birthday. We were informed by the Honourable Minister for Economy that it was celebrated last night and we were hoping some pieces of cake would come.

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- But obviously not, but speaking of cakes, Madam Speaker, I get the impression that the Opposition want to have their cake and eat it too.

They are complaining about the Budget; how much we spent, the handouts, that is supposed to be given to the public at large, but they are not telling themselves to move away from handouts. They are not telling their families to come away from freebies. They are not telling their supporters that they should get away from free school fees and free bus fares. So really, Madam Speaker, they are a bit inconsistent in what they want to talk about when they talk about our economy.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, to the 70-year old vegetable farmer from Sigatoka whose livelihood was washed away by *TC Josie's* floodwaters, I dare the Opposition to call the fertiliser and seedlings he received from our Farms-Care programme a "hand-out."

To the Fijian schoolgirl living in deep-rural Vanua Levu, the first in her family's history to receive a formal education, reading her free maths textbook under the light of Government-subsidised electricity, I dare the Opposition to call the opportunities at her feet "hand-outs."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the grandmother living with diabetes in Lami, who is struggling to meet the cost of her treatments, I dare the Opposition to call the Government-subsidised dialysis that she will receive at one of Fiji's soon-to-open kidney centres a "hand-out."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the mourning widow in Lautoka whose financial struggles would have once forced her to choose between a proper burial for her husband or Christmas gifts for her children, I dare the Opposition to call the payment she received from Government's new Family Insurance a "hand-out."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the tertiary student studying engineering in Suva who comes from a low-income family, relying on his increased bus fare subsidy to get to and from class every day and accessing his assignments online using a new, free Wi-Fi hotspot, I dare the Opposition to belittle his Government assistance as a "hand-out."

(Hon. Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the mother of a newborn boy in Nadi who would have once needed to worry about taking unpaid time off work to care for her baby, and who would struggle to pay for nappies and formula, I dare the Opposition to call her extended maternity leave and a Parenthood Assistance Payment a "hand-out."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the Fijian in Nausori who was able to break through the generational cycle of poverty by turning her green thumb into a nursery business that now employs three staff, I dare the Opposition to call the plants and tools she purchased with a Micro and Small Business Grant a “hand-out.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the young Fijian boy living with a disability in Labasa who struggles to move his wheelchair from the bedroom to the bathroom, and whose house, constructed without his needs in mind, never truly felt like a home, I dare the Opposition to call the new ramp and structural upgrades he receives from the Budget a “hand-out.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To the family in Ba, Madam Speaker who saw their home and all of their possessions destroyed by a mudslide during *TCKeni*, I dare the Opposition to call the construction materials they purchased through Homes-Care a “hand-out.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I think I made it quite clear: my Government, and this Budget, does not give hand-outs. It gives Fijians of all walks of life a leg-up.

(Applause)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- It helps Fijian families to help themselves. As I have said, it is a building block in a larger vision for a prosperous Fiji.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, it takes a profound amount of skill to put together a National Budget that maintains a delicate balance of fiscal responsibility, while still providing the most benefit possible back to the Fijian people. This Budget accomplishes that balance with prudent craftsmanship and economic experience. And Madam Speaker, a timely budget is a budget that could only be accomplished by FijiFirst.

(Applause)

This Budget is a clear example of how my Government leads, and how we will continue to lead to ensure all Fijians have a brighter future. All Fijians must consider this fact during this week’s debate, and in the critical months ahead. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members.

I am allowing the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security to deliver his speech now, given his involvement on the visit of the Honourable Prime Minister of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea. The Honourable Veena Bhatnagar will take up the Honourable Minister’s place as outlined in the Batting Order.

I now call on the Honourable Minister for Defence to take the floor.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, let me first of all thank you for allowing me to swap slots with the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise this afternoon to lend my wholehearted support to the Budget of 2018 to 2019.

Madam Speaker, allow me to commend the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for a budget that embraces the crucial role of defence and national security in the country. Furthermore, the Government's vision for progressive development and ensuring a safe and secure Fiji is expressively addressed in this Budget.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's defence and security landscape has transformed over the years due to changes in demographics, devastating and frequent natural disasters, and technology enabling new cyber security challenges.

Our Disciplinary Forces, the Military and the Police, are empowered by their constitutional obligation to ensure at all times the safety and security, defence and wellbeing of Fiji and all Fijians. Madam Speaker, this Budget allows the two Disciplinary Forces to carry out their roles and responsibilities resourcefully and competently.

My Ministry is well aware of its primary responsibility and that is, to provide policy oversight over the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Fiji Police Force (FPF), to ensure that public safety and security is realised. For this purpose, the Ministry has embarked on its security review over the last three years to modernise and transform the security mechanisms of Government.

The 2018-2019 Budget permits the Ministry to progress towards an innovative pathway that embraces national strategic development plans which reflect the spirit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Budget takes us a step further and now, we are beginning to implement those plans.

Madam Speaker, accordingly, the total budget of the Ministry of Defence and National Security in 2018 to 2019 is \$6.3 million. The increase in the budget allocation by \$1 million is mainly attributed to the following:

- the increase in staffing for the National Security and Defence Review;
- hosting of Fiji Day Celebrations throughout the country;
- increases in other operating expenditure for travel and communication, maintenance and purchase of goods and services; and also
- an increase in capital projects.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Police Force is responsible for maintaining law and order in Fiji by employing the best practices in police work by using modern technologies and innovative strategies to prevent criminal activities. The Force engages in a wide range of activities to maintain professional personnel who are well-trained and well-equipped to handle evolving criminal threats.

There is no doubt that the Force requires all the assistance it can get to mitigate the concerns of our internal security; management of criminal and security landscape; humanitarian and disaster response; recovery and relief commitment to sub-regional/regional and international obligations; and by transforming the Fiji Police Force in becoming a modern policing and law enforcement agency that we all can be proud of.

The review of the Police Force's Annual Reports prepared by the bipartisan Standing Committee of Parliament on Foreign Affairs and Defence, recommended progressive improvements in many of the areas that have been funded in this Budget.

We will be witnessing a momentous period in our history, as this could not be achieved or rather have been neglected by previous Governments, who have repeatedly failed to address the most vital component of any successful economy and that is, the provision of security. This Government has therefore provided the environment to review and reform the Fiji Police Force since Independence.

Madam Speaker, this Budget finally allows the Fiji Police Force to fulfil its vision by aligning its strategy with strengthening capabilities and acquisition of resources. This is to respond effectively to the current crime landscape, enabling a safe and secure environment for citizens to reside, investors to invest and trade, as well as our valued tourists to visit our shores of hospitality.

Madam Speaker, this Government is liberating the Police Force out of traditional policing into meeting challenges in the sophisticated and modern policing era. The use of technologies, demographic and statistical analysis, rural and urban planning concepts, *Duavata* Community Policing, the use of drones, motor cycles, a new fleet of vehicles as provided by the Government under the lease agreement, as well as those recently provided generously by the Chinese Government, CCTV cameras, a DNA and Forensic Lab, a Cybercrimes Unit, police patrol boats, latest communication technologies, satellite imaging, tracking devices and a lot more specialised and well-trained investigators to help solve existing and new crimes as quickly as possible.

Madam Speaker, we are forming new relationships and engaged in an ever-expanding international network of security specialists, who are going to transfer the necessary technical and specialist skills that will enable our police to finally get a firm grip on Fiji's crime, and ultimately ensure our citizens' security.

Madam Speaker, the total budget for the FPF in 2018-2019 is \$193.5 million, comprising of \$165.6 million for Operating Expenditure, \$23.8 million for Capital Expenditure and VAT component of \$4.1 million. The increase of \$46.6 million in 2018-2019 is attributed to an:

- increase of \$24.6 million to regularise 421 positions in the first Phase and creation of a further 180 constabulary positions;
- increase in other operating expenses for licencing renewals, travel and subsistence and incidentals;
- increase in special expenditure due to a new allocation for the 2018 General Election operations;
- increase in capital construction programmes by \$14 million for the upgrading of existing facilities and construction of three major new police stations in Nadi, Lautoka and Nakasi; and

- other supporting infrastructure necessary, such as the upgrade of the Police Dog Section and others.

Madam Speaker, as part of progressive improvements, Phase 1 as reflected in this Budget, enables the Fiji Police Force to stabilise its current structure by regularising 421 positions. Over the years, the Fiji Police Force had temporarily established police stations and specialised units by sourcing personnel from within its existing strength. This regularisation process will allow the Fiji Police Force to formalise its establishment to the required manning level. Additionally, the creation of 180 constabulary positions will allow the absorption of special constables into the regular force, which is part of the phasing out of the Special Constable cadre.

Also, Madam Speaker, this whole process is part of the five-year restructure implementation phase where the overall manpower will be more than doubled by 2023.

Madam Speaker, in this Budget, we anticipate new initiatives which includes the following:

1. \$1 million is allocated to start construction on a new Nalawa Police Station in Ra which was damaged by *TC Winston*.
2. \$500,000 for the construction of new living quarters for community posts and rural stations.
3. \$720,000 is allocated for the purchase of police boats and outboard engines to provide maritime security for ports of entry, efficient and effective border management services; timely and effective response to criminal activities and disasters in open waters.
4. \$150,000 has been provided for the procurement of a generator for the forensic services to provide backup power supply in Nasova.
5. \$300,000 is provided to supply and install video-recorded interview machines. This will support the reform of police procedures and practices, following the United Nations Convention against Torture and other cruel inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment and also improve overall efficiency of police interviews.

The new initiatives I have just noted, Madam Speaker, will give the Fiji Police Force leverage to adapting to the changes in the strategic law enforcement environment. Knowledge and anticipation, prevention, deterrence, protection and intervention are at the heart of police work. Improving operational support for more effective and successful criminal prosecutions through increased allocations for court witnesses fees, training, witness and suspects' meals are also considered. Madam Speaker, this will allow witnesses to willingly and efficiently support the Police through transparent and fair prosecution processes. About \$593,000 is allocated for this purpose.

Madam Speaker, as we increase our manpower, it is only prudent that we provide them with the necessary resources by constructing new police stations and police posts, and improving existing posts to better the services rendered by the Police. The rest of the increase allows:

1. Station upgrades for the Kadavu Police Station and the upgrade of our Nasese Garage.
2. The upgrade of institutional police quarters, covering the planned works for quarters at the priority posts and stations.

3. The installation of three solar power units annually in maritime and remote police stations and police posts.
4. The purchase of communication equipment to improve response times and surveillance of public areas.
5. Basic policing tools and standard operational equipment.
6. Information technology equipment to improve recording and reporting for police investigations for use in successful trials.
7. Quality control systems and training for Forensic Bio and DNA Lab.
8. Chemistry and lab equipment for toxicology, trace and sample analysis.

Madam Speaker, the restructure will strengthen our presence and service delivery here at home, as well as expand our footprints in the regional and international arena of policing, law enforcement, peacekeeping and inter-agency collaboration. This Government is providing officers, posts and stations with proper crime-fighting skills and the equipment to effectively detect criminal activity and take swift action to maintain public safety.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Police Force will continue to develop and grow its workforce to meet up to its modern day standards and when we envisage scholarships will be extended to our Police personnel in the areas of demand to meet new age requirements, such as physical, financial and cyber-forensics, leadership development, improved investigations procedures and techniques and other specialist fields.

Madam Speaker, on the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, the 2013 Constitution entrusts the Republic of Fiji Military Forces with the responsibility, and I quote: “to ensure at all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and all Fijians.” In this regard, the RFMF in the 2018-2019 Budget has been allocated a total sum of \$103.2 million, an increase of \$7.1 million. This, Madam Speaker, represents an increase of approximately 7.4 percent when compared to the 2017-2018 Budget.

The increase reflects Government’s commitment in ensuring that the RFMF is postured correctly and has the capability and capacity to perform its constitutional role and be ready to tackle the modern days security challenges brought about by climate change, radicalism and transnational crime, to name a few.

Madam Speaker, I will now briefly update this House on some of the major highlights of the 2018-2019 Budget for the RFMF. The RFMF’s operation strategy is to be able to respond independently and effectively to more immediate challenges. Therefore, the bulk of the budget is skewed towards maintaining operational response, readiness and the conduct of services to the nation such as:

- conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts;
- conducting search and rescue missions in Fiji’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and remote search and rescue missions on land;
- mapping and update of hydrographic nautical charts for maritime users; and
- assisting Government in delivering Government projects in rural and remote parts of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, for the 2018-2019 financial year, the RFMF will place greater emphasis on investing in institutional knowledge and fostering its human capital development through training and development programmes. Such training is important for the correct posturing of the RFMF and more so, in enhancing interoperability with their counterparts, as was effectively witnessed during the *TC Winston* HADR operations when RFMF was working in concert with the Australian, New Zealand and other Defence Forces.

The budget increase covers for:

- overseas training;
- in-house trainings including promotional courses;
- increase in meal allowances; and
- periodic replacement of head-to-toe kits.

Madam Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of this House the establishment of the RFMF Band. The RFMF Band was formed in 1917 and has evolved over the years earning them a legacy and reputation that has stretched far beyond Fiji's shores.

In 2017, the RFMF celebrated the Centennial Anniversary-100 years of its establishment. Due to the heavy commitment of the RFMF Band both domestically and internationally, there is a need to expand the RFMF Band.

In the 2018-2019 financial year, the RFMF will be establishing a Navy Band, targeting unemployed youths with talent and interest in music. The plan is to collaborate with the Ministry of Youth and Sports Training Centre that provides music training.

Madam Speaker, the RFMF through its Engineering Regiment, implements an extensive range of capital projects in Fiji, mainly in the rural and maritime regions which has helped improve the livelihoods of ordinary Fijians. These include projects initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister, donor agencies and other ministries and departments.

Apart from this, the Unit looks after the upgrade and maintenance of RFMF quarters and buildings. Funds have been allocated for preliminary works for the construction of a new warehouse at Jerusalem Road in Nabua. The main objective of this project is to centralise procurement and distribution of goods and services in order to ensure effective control and management of stores. The secondary role of the warehouse will be to facilitate storage and distribution of HADR stores.

Madam Speaker, the Nadi Black Rock Integrated Peacekeeping Centre caters for training in military personnel who prepares themselves for peacekeeping missions. In the next financial year, funding provisions will cater for civil works, completion of mess hall and other minor upgrading works.

Also, Madam Speaker, Information Technology plays a vital role in achieving productivity and efficiency in any organisation. As such, funding allocated will assist in the upgrading of IT Infrastructure and equipment for the RFMF. To ensure that ammunitions and explosives are safely kept, funding has been allocated for the upgrade of the Camp's magazine building and for the upgrade and renovation of the Camp's Armoury.

Madam Speaker, moving on, the RFMF's Naval Division is responsible for the surveillance of Fiji's maritime boundary, including our Exclusive Economic Zone.

In May this year, 79 recruits successfully passed out from the Navy's Training Base in Togalevu. In upholding equal employment opportunities, this was the first time that the Navy has recruited 26 females.

Madam Speaker, moving onto Head 49 which pertains to Peacekeeping Operations, the RFMF is charged with providing Forces for international peacekeeping operations in line with Government's foreign commitment and maintaining world peace.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion let me say that this Government has taken some bold steps to ensure our national security and defence capabilities evolve and adapt to challenges on the frontline. The Ministry and the two Disciplinary Forces have embarked on restructure and reforms that will ensure that Fiji remains a safe and secure home for all Fijians, and the 2018–2019 Budget provides them the enabling resources to carry out the difficult tasks ahead.

Madam Speaker, I again reiterate my wholehearted support for the 2018-2019 Budget. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, at this point we will adjourn and break for lunch which will be for one hour, and we will resume at 2 o'clock.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.06 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.02 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management to have the floor.

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of Cabinet, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I rise to support the motion before the House and I acknowledge and congratulate the Honourable Minister for Economy for a comprehensive 2018-2019 Budget.

Madam Speaker, the Budget denotes the FijiFirst Government's direction and firm commitment towards ensuring that wider and meaningful public consultations were conducted in the process of formulating it. The consultation is evidently participatory and inclusive to affirm all Fijians' say on this Budget, matters to the Government in addressing our genuine needs, addressing our hopes and addressing all the Fijian people's dreams to move our country forward especially in pursuing the growth of Fiji's rural and maritime economy.

To this end, this Budget fully espouses Government's ongoing commitment towards rural development, fully embracing the vast impact it has on the lives of ordinary Fijians who reside in our rural and maritime areas.

Madam Speaker, my speech will focus on the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. This afternoon, I will start with a few statistics on Fiji's rural and maritime population.

The result of the 2017 National Census revealed that 44.1 percent or 390,635 of Fiji's population reside in the rural and maritime area. On the other hand, the urban population was recorded to be 55.9 percent or 494,252. Therefore the rural and maritime population, Madam Speaker, has decreased by 5.3 percent or 21,790 from the previous National Census conducted in 2007.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the 2017 National Census indicated a population increase of 16.3 percent or 69,406 for urban residents and that was attributed mainly to the extension of urban areas, as well as the increase in rural to urban drift.

Madam Speaker, I also draw your attention to related and interesting finding from the 2013-2014 National Household Income and Expenditure Survey. This National Survey reported a decline in the incidence of rural poverty from 43 percent in 2008-2009 to 36.7 percent in 2013-2014.

Madam Speaker, to further break this recorded percentage difference by Divisions, the incidence of poverty in the rural areas of the Western Division indicated a notable decline of 16.5 percent between 2008-2009 and 2013-2014 Household Survey, while rural poverty in the Eastern and Northern Divisions had reportedly increased to 2.5 percent and 12 percent respectively.

For rural areas in the Central Division, the incidence of poverty had showed a less than 1 percent increase or 0.9 percent or to be exact from 36 percent to 36.9 percent.

Madam Speaker, if we were to also consider the geographical spread of poverty in the rural areas of Fiji, of the total rural population of 49.2 percent which is slightly less than that of the country's total, the highest number resides in the Central Division comprising of 33.9 percent and closely followed by the Western Division which is 32.2 percent.

Madam Speaker, a key finding also drawn from these official statistics revealed that our rural dwellers were over-represented in as far as the rural and urban distribution of Fiji's poor population was concerned. Hence, 62.6 percent are reportedly poor and living in the rural areas.

Madam Speaker, these national statistics which I have just mentioned are important to highlight because they are basis for both, ongoing and new initiatives of Government that are budgeted for to accommodate or to address the needs of our rural and maritime communities. Obviously, Madam Speaker, the Government provides and will continue to do so in providing the means to empower deserving individuals, deserving families and deserving communities in assessing better and brighter opportunities to raise their standards of living and meeting Government's commitment in achieving national development targets.

Madam Speaker, I am confident that this Budget will address the current realities, while at the same time prepare every Fijian family for the unforeseen future. The Budget expressively places an emphasis on the family unit, allowing our families as rural and maritime dwellers to enjoy the same opportunities available in the urban areas. This is primarily, Madam Speaker, the basis of my support for the 2018-2019 Budget.

Madam Speaker, the Budget most definitely demonstrates Government's recognition of the remoteness and isolation of our rural and maritime communities and restates its commitment in developing strategies and programmes that would address this isolation through providing opportunities made available to them. These opportunities are reflected in the health, education, fisheries, forestry, agriculture and the infrastructure budgetary provisions.

Madam Speaker, the 2018-2019 Budget for the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development provides a sum of \$21.7 million, an increase of \$1.2 million from the 2017-2018 financial year Budget. This increase is attributed to the increase in Operating Expenditure and in the Public Sector Investment Programmes, including civil, fencing and landscaping works for the construction of new Assistant District Offices (ADO) at Namarai and Korolevu Government Stations. These new offices are expected to improve Government services provided to the people of Nakorotubu coastal in the Ra Province and also the island of Vatulele and Baravi coastal in the Nadroga Province.

Madam Speaker, a sum of \$2.8 million is allocated for the construction of Government stations at Vunidawa in middle Naitasiri in Wainikoro in Macuata, the Government Station in Kubulau in Bua, and the Government station in Wainua, which is in the upper reaches of the Naitasiri province. This new Assistant District Office is to ensure Government's reach of 24/7 into these areas.

Madam Speaker, this is the third financial year that budget has been allocated for project preparatory works for the Ministry's Public Sector Investment Programmes. The project preparatory works budget ensures that the Divisional Commissioners plan well in advance and are well-prepared to implement Government's capital works. Delays in land acquisition, delays in land surveys and ground works preparation resulting in prolonged project implementation will now be mitigated.

Madam Speaker, a sum of \$740,030 is again allocated for our District Advisory Counsellors monthly allowances and administrative expenses for the 2018-2019 Financial year. The allowances, Madam Speaker, is meant to cover the cost of their role as advisors representing the designated district in serving as the conduit between Government and the people.

Madam Speaker, the Government road shows continue to be part of Government's effort to maximise awareness of its services to the rural and maritime areas. It continues to be a popular programme and it is an opportunity for Government and stakeholders and the private sector to reach out more and improve service delivery to our rural and remote communities.

In addition, Madam Speaker, it promotes the exposure and focus on our rural school children to be reasonably knowledgeable on the types of career they can pursue upon completion of their primary and secondary education.

Madam Speaker, the budget for Government road shows is maintained at \$200,000. Three road shows have successfully been conducted in this current financial year with the final one scheduled for the Western Division in the middle of this month - July. Madam Speaker, the Ministry plans to hold another four road shows in the next financial year (one for each Division).

The Ministry's Capital Programme budget for the rural and maritime areas is tagged at \$4 million, including an allocation of \$1.5 million for Self-Help Projects, \$2 million for the construction of community access roads, footpaths and footbridges, which was formerly known as non-cane access roads and \$500,000 allocation for emergency water supply.

Madam Speaker, the construction of community access roads, footpaths and footbridges promotes better infrastructure, safety and decent living for our rural and maritime communities. They are also means to access basic services and better roads for income-generating, accessing health services, schools and also their markets.

Madam Speaker, the Programme, therefore, aims to improve living standards by providing the means for improving access to better opportunities and growth. Madam Speaker, the recent foot-crossing completed for the two tidal islands of Qoma and Nabulebulewa, off the Northern Coast of Tailevu provides safety for children to walk to school instead of having to wade through sea water or boat transfers.

Madam Speaker, the grants to Self-Help Programme is to empower our rural population with social and income-generating initiatives and the Ministry has, over the past three years, focused on increasing this. This grant provides the financial resources to all Fijians, even in the remotest communities to develop and support income-generating projects that are viable and sustainable.

Madam Speaker, the Emergency Water Supply allocation is also to assist our rural communities with the provision of water during periods of emergencies.

Madam Speaker, the Rural Housing Assistance Programme, as announced during the Budget Address will now be administered under the new Ministry of Housing and Community Development. Nevertheless, I note that the Ministry of Rural Development will continue to support this Programme through our Provincial Administration Office by identifying our rural communities that require housing assistance, and also our rural and maritime people to be trained to build resilient homes and are funded from the Rural Carpentry Training allocation.

Madam Speaker, with the new budgetary provisions, the Ministry will continue to bring a difference and at the same time build resilience in the lives of our rural and maritime population.

On that note, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of the House, I fully commend the 2018 and 2019 Budget and thank you for your indulgence. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Parmod Chand to take the floor.

(Applause)

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to contribute to the 2018-2019 Appropriation Bill, handed down by the Honourable Minister for Economy, on 28th June 2018.

I would call it a Budget of “I Love Me” Government. This is colloquially how people tend to label boastful personalities who cannot stop singing praises about themselves.

Madam Speaker, this I believe is the 13th Budget of both the military regime and the current government and both headed by the same leader, and it is the 5th Budget handed down by the Minister for Economy of the FijiFirst Government after the September 2014 General Elections.

The theme of the First Budget in this Parliament was, “Turning promises into deeds”. It was then labelled by the Honourable Government Members as the “Mother of all Budgets”. But, Madam Speaker, it turned out to be the “Mother of Misdeeds” with the loud proclamations in that Budget being tossed out a year later with the imposition of VAT on basic food items and prescribed medication.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, claims to cater for all Fijian families who, this Government suddenly realises now, matter.

We know why they matter because this government is clutching at straws and fears the worst, and in doing so, it thinks that it can camouflage its failure and please the people of Fiji with this Budget, that is a pre-Election bribe, but what has been offered is much too little and way too late.

Madam Speaker, let us look at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, and whether it has improved over the past four years. The allocation of \$335 million in this Budget sounds good but when we review it using the recommended budget allocation set by the World Health Organisation (WHO), it is simply not enough.

The Health budget allocation is down to 7.9 percent of the total Budget, more than 3 percent below the World Health Organisation recommended figure of over 11 percent for the region. The Health to GDP ratio is 2.8 percent which is again below the stipulated minimum of the 5 percent WHO regional recommendation.

Madam Speaker, both figures are well below allocated recommendations and ranking of how poorly health care is placed in the Government’s vision despite being the third highest priority of this Government behind the Education and the Fiji Roads Authority in this Budget.

Madam Speaker, the state of health and medical services as we have continued to highlight is a blight on our nation, totally deteriorated. There is no denying this and if the Government believes this is not true, then they should do what the majority of all Fijian families who matter do, and go to the health centres and hospitals, take a patient number, wait in the queue, endure the environment and maybe mosquito bites for a few hours before they can finally see a doctor or better still, they might like to get admitted in a ward where patients share single washroom and shower, and need to do their own beddings and sleep in wards that do not have mosquito screens. They might learn something when they see how our doctors, nurses and ancillary staff are struggling to do their job with the bare minimum of facilities and equipment. I am sure that would be an enriching experience for some who enjoy private and personalised medical care, fly overseas first class or even business class ...

HON. MEMBER.- Like you.

HON. P. CHAND.- ... and who entitle themselves to exorbitant allowances, I pay my own.

(Laughter)

They will, Madam Speaker, find out that hospitals and health centres do not have basic medication, have malfunctioning equipment, lack beds and beddings, have disgusting washrooms, have malfunctioning and in some cases unworkable lifts, have unpainted and unmaintained buildings and have an overworked and understaffed workforce that is doing its best despite the obstacles and depressing environment.

Madam Speaker, building new hospitals and health centres is progressive but Government cannot even maintain the existing facilities. Even a new centre in Makoi was barely staffed and not utilised for a long time with patients being referred to the CWM Hospital. The Nakasi Health Centre, while it has four walls, is all locked up.

Madam Speaker, breaking ground with billboards, announcing new medical facilities are one thing, and having functional facilities is quite another. We hope this will change for the better.

On 9th March this year, I asked a written question to the Honourable Attorney-General who is also the Minister for Civil Service to inform Parliament of the number of doctors recruited, both locally and overseas to work in public hospitals and health centres, since the enactment of the Medical and Dental Practitioners Act 2010.

Four months have lapsed and no written answer has been provided. This is totally unacceptable, it is a blatant breach of Standing Order 43(3), where the answer must be provided within seven sitting days. This is not how Parliamentary democracy should be treated by anyone, least of all, the Honourable Attorney-General, who is also the Minister responsible for Parliament.

In the absence of information, Madam Speaker, we do not know how many doctors have been recruited. One would have thought that after the enactment of the amendment to the Act that empowered the Honourable Minister for Health to recruit doctors without the approval of the Fiji Medical Council.

Madam Speaker, Parliament was informed by the former Minister for Health that by 2017, the doctor to population ratio will be 1:8000 people that is a doctor to a thousand patients, which means 900 doctors. Have we achieved this? We do not think so because of the reasons that I have just given - we have not been supplied with information. The Free Medicine Scheme, Madam Speaker, has been tweaked and pharmacies will now dispense from the list of 142 free medicines and send a bill every month to the Ministry instead of being supplied the medicines as has been the case.

Madam Speaker, we note that this is the third attempt to launch something which is already free for all individuals in the public health system in the last four budgets. But this will not resolve the problem of those recipients under this scheme to access any medication prescribed by a doctor. The tweaked process falls far short of what is required for logistical integrity.

The private retail pharmacists are not supported logistically with equipment and human resource and are still unaware of the balance of items after two years. The tangential vision is that the private sector will purchase the medication and Government will reimburse the private sector. Additionally, the importation of sub-standard pharmaceuticals and consumables had to be addressed with the Pharmaceutical Products Act in 2013-2014. Some items in Fiji are not even approved in the countries of origin and, Madam Speaker, this is unacceptable.

Similarly, General Practitioners are now being encouraged to set up practices in rural, maritime and peri-urban areas in what is a stop-gap measure. We understand that no consultation

has taken place with the stakeholders in the private practice, namely the Fiji College of Practitioners, as to the programmes feasibility or sustainability.

This is similar to the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) being espoused by the Honourable Attorney- General when he first announced to the staff of Lautoka Hospital at the beginning of March. On the other hand, he berated staff by saying they were taking home utensils, cutlery and beddings. This is how this Government thinks it can boost the morale of our health workforce.

Madam Speaker, the proposed privatisation of Lautoka and Ba Hospitals announced by the Honourable Attorney-General under PPP confirms the National Federation Party's firm belief that the FijiFirst Government has failed abysmally to deliver decent and quality medical and health care to the people of Fiji, as its most fundamental obligation in a social contract between the State and the people.

This Government, Madam Speaker, paid little attention to our major hospitals and medical facilities. It did not lack resources but refused to prioritise improvements to medical and health-care. The Government is now forcing the people of Western Division to pay for health-care. The very same pockets shackled by high cost of living in the West are expected to fork out more.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Don't lie. Don't lie.

HON. P. CHAND.- In March, the Attorney-General also announced a National Health Insurance Scheme, but it lacks merit in the face of massive failures by the Bainimarama regime

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of order, Madam Speaker!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, what the Honourable Member said is factually incorrect. He said that we are now going to force the people in the Western Division to pay for medical services which they currently are not paying for. That is factually incorrect. Like his leader, they are pulling out all these supposed facts from thin air. That is completely incorrect. We have now said - he is misleading Parliament. The point of order is misleading Parliament by saying that we are now going to force the people in the Western Division to pay for medical services, which they currently are not paying for.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Misleading! Misleading! Withdraw it!

HON. P. CHAND.- Eventually people will have to pay, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have been alleged to have misled Parliament.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Withdraw that misleading statement that you have just made.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He is not misleading.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He is misleading.

HON. P. CHAND.- I withdraw that and I say this, Madam Speaker, now

HON. SPEAKER.- Excuse me, can you withdraw without...?

HON. P. CHAND.- Yes, I withdraw it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, you may carry on then.

HON. P. CHAND.- Yes, eventually people will end up paying and I also ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, Madam Speaker, he is saying, “eventually people will pay for it.” That is incorrect Madam Speaker. How can he make that assumption? Again, Madam Speaker, he is misleading Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you just continue with your speech you had withdrawn, and do not make any comments on the

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Just continue.

HON. P. CHAND.- The National Health Insurance Scheme, it was announced but it lacks merit in the face of massive failures by the Bainimarama regime and the FijiFirst Government, resulting in severe deterioration of delivery of health services and medical care.

The Honourable Attorney-General had also announced that Expressions of Interest (EOI) would be called first and further revealed the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) would be one of their partners. It is logical to ask why the workers of Fiji whose interest is supposed to be protected by the FNPF have not been consulted. Why are the workers pockets continually being punched and kicked to cough up more without their consent?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- The announcement has been another gimmick designed to hoodwink the people ahead of the General Elections – more than ever before.

On the brighter side, Madam Speaker, we see that the Opposition’s repeated motions to increase allocation for kidney dialysis is finally coming to fruition. But then again, the subsidised treatment is not available to those who undergo dialysis at the Kidney Foundation.

Madam Speaker, it is not immediately clear why the Kidney Foundation is being singled out and we note with interest the concern raised by the now departed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Consumer Council in a 2017 statement, querying the disparity in fees being charged but this does not justify a blanket blacklist like this. There should have been more effort by the Government to discuss this and ensure that as many kidney dialysis treatment centres are made available to alleviate the pain and suffering of those suffering from this illness.

Madam Speaker, I am a businessman, a bus operator and also a large scale cane grower. So I declare my interest when I talk about bus operators and businesses. Regretfully within the four years we have been in this Parliament, Standing Order 59, which compels us all as elected Members of Parliament to register pecuniary or other specified interest, has never seen the light of day.

Let me say, Madam Speaker, that as a businessman, the high cost of doing business in Fiji is not a joke anymore. The cost of establishing a business is financially excruciating. The range of fees and charges are exorbitantly high while there are little incentives for a vast majority of businesses except for a privileged few that I will explain in a minute.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's latest ranking on the Ease of Doing Business Index created by prominent economists at the World Bank is ranked 101 out of 190 countries worldwide. It fell four places from a ranking of 97 in 2017.

In 2006, before the military *coup*, Fiji's ranking was 34th out of 190 nations. Our ranking is rated as medium while our neighbour, New Zealand, occupy first position on a list of 48 nations, with a rating of "very easy" on the Ease of Doing Business. Worse, our regional neighbours, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu are ranked above us. So much for FijiFirst being an investor-friendly government.

Madam Speaker, I just mentioned that a privileged few were enjoying a calm, peaceful and in most cases profitable business operation and we wonder why? In one case in Savusavu, one investor is preferred over another and even has obtained leases of State land that belong to the Savusavu Town Council. That investor is well-known to the Government and I have documentary evidence that I am sure has been given to the Honourable Attorney-General as well as to possibly two other Honourable Ministers.

Madam Speaker, there are many questions about this particular operation:

- How this particular business obtained lease on a large piece of land that was in control of the town council?
- How this business is allowed to operate an aging helicopter and escape CAAFI's strict regulation?
- How this business has been awarded Medivac services by the Ministry of Health and Services?
- How this business has lately contracted out Medivac services to a Nadi based flying company because it is now in a financial strife?
- How this business obtained a loan of more than \$970,000 from a local bank?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, this investor was given a licence by this Government to operate a business over another investor who was fully prepared to comply with all the regulatory requirements. How and why did this happen?

This issue re-enforces the need for transparency, accountability and good governance. It re-enforces the need for fair and equitable distribution of wealth. That is what the National Budget and

Government policies should achieve. And this brings me to an allocation of \$12.5 million in this Budget and \$8 million for the construction of a new office complex for the Honourable Prime Minister.

In the last two years, there was an allocation of \$10 million comprising \$5 million in each budget. No one knows where and how this was spent. In total, \$18 million ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- ... would have been allocated for this expenditure, inclusive of this financial year's budget.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Procurement called for tenders for this project this year. The Project Director's name is from an engineering firm whose principal is a member of the Constitutional Offices Commission (COC). Not only on the COC, he is also a member of other Boards like the Fiji National Provident Fund, Amalgamated Telecom Holdings (ATH) and Fiji Roads Authority.

The firm, whose principal is this COC member, has been awarded supervision of many other civil and structural engineering contracts, including the construction of the Fiji Aviation Academy.

We all know that he is heavily involved with political activities of the FijiFirst, including interviews of applicants for candidacy of FijiFirst that the Honourable Attorney-General himself is the FijiFirst General Secretary and Registered Officer, did not deny in his reaction to our leader's revelation last week. Notwithstanding also that the gentleman in question is a major fundraiser for FijiFirst as well.

Madam Speaker, it is therefore too much of a coincidence if the firm of which he is a principal is awarded contracts for major projects, more often than not, also acting as project consultants.

Similarly, in another case, a regular donor to the FijiFirst coffers of which we have evidence is listed as a key part of the project for a medical facility in Nakasi. There are many other cases that we can cite, Madam Speaker, where the use of public funds can be critically examined as to who its beneficiaries are, but for now these are sufficient.

The fact is that every business that fulfils the stringent requirements of a tender process must have an equal opportunity to bid for projects funded by taxpayers. This may have been the case, but unless and until evidence to this effect is produced, lingering doubt and questions about the lack ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order in the House. Please, we would like to hear Honourable Parmod Chand.

Honourable Parmod Chand?

HON. P. CHAND.- .. of transparency and accountability will remain.

Madam Speaker, when all is said and done, this Budget, which is attempting to bribe our voters, is a colossal failure in addressing the fundamental grievances of all our people and all our families. On the single most important count of all, it has exacerbated the already significantly high cost of living instead of reducing cost of basic food items. It has failed to fix our public health and

medical services and it lacks transparency and accountability. It is a Budget of a few good overshadowed by seriously bad and the ghastly ugly policies.

Madam Speaker, this Budget does not represent many of the things that need to be done in the Northern Division. I come from the Northern Division, we are severely ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- ... neglected with road conditions in the rural areas. Electricity supply, I remember in the last Budget, there was a budget provision for electricity from Seaqaqa School right to Solove, it has not been done, it was simply not done, it was in the budget, finance was there, it was not done and this is how things roll over. A budget means that when you have a project, when you have a programme, it should be done within that fiscal year. It is very important and singing praises here, condemning other people, and doing all these things, will not achieve much.

One of the most important things in the Northern Division is that we have a single road that is going through the Labasa Town and the Labasa people have been crying out for ages for a by-pass road, which is not

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Read the Budget, read the details!

HON. P. CHAND.- I have read the Budget, it is not there and we have been crying for many years. You have been in power for the last 12 years. Madam Speaker, we need an immediate....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- We know there is an allocation, there is an allocation, I understand, but what I am saying is

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- It is very important that what we bring in the budget, what we propose, those things need to be done, and also Madam Speaker, it is important for us to understand this.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- There are a lot of things to be done...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Wait until there is silence, then you can carry on, we will give you extra time.

HON. P. CHAND.- I simply explained very properly that there are budget provisions for electricity, roads and everything; it is there in the budget but not done. That is what I am saying. I am not saying that it is not there, it is there. The provision is there, only God knows if it comes to fruition or not. That is my simple question.

So, Madam Speaker, it is very, very important for the Government side not to say that we are doing political points scoring, if anyone is doing that, it is the Government because the Government has Permanent Secretaries, CEOs sitting in boards and everywhere. They can go and do the handing out; why should it take a Government to go and call 10,000 or 12,000 people at the Nadi Prince

Charles Park and distribute. The civil servants are there, they are the rightful people who should hand over those things, not the Government. They want pictures, they want to show compassion, but there is no compassion, with the cost of living in this country, people are suffering severely.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- There is severe suffering due to the cost of living in this country. Madam Speaker, thank you so much.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise and give a contribution in my support to the 2018-2019 Appropriation Bill.

I would like to start by saying that without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of unity within a nation. Caring, leading to unity, can only be achieved through a leadership filled with love for people of a nation.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; a very good afternoon to you all.

Madam Speaker, I can only say that it is remarkable to see the continued love of our FijiFirst Government in regards to the care the Government has shown to the children of this nation. The FijiFirst Government under the leadership and vision of our Honourable Prime Minister has always ensured that the most fundamental right of any human being, in this particular case, the children and the students of Fiji, our nation is never ignored, which is a person's right to education.

The FijiFirst Government continues to invest heavily in education, and in this Budget it has gone up to a record breaking, billion dollars. Madam Speaker, this phenomenal allocation only goes to show how much the people, in particular, the children, who mostly benefit from Government's various educational incentives mean.

Madam Speaker, education is the foundation upon which we build our nation. The FijiFirst Government over the years since its inception have continued to realise how important this foundation is.

Madam Speaker, allow me to share two very random, simple but very impactful experiences I have felt. Once was way back during my days as the high school teacher, I was teaching at one of the rural-based schools. There were two students, a brother and a sister, who were unfortunately not intellectually capable to go through normal high school education. In fact, they had problem even writing from A to Z.

During one of my school recess breaks, I had the liberty of randomly meeting their father by chance. Upon my discussion with the individual, I advised him that it would be better if he sent his children to a special school. The response this father gave me touched the deeper senses of my heart.

Madam Speaker, he said and I quote:

“Irrespective of how my children are in terms of their school performance, if our nation's Prime Minister can undertake the responsibility of providing free bus fare, free

school tuition and book fee, why cannot I as a parent be responsible enough to send them, at least, to school every day?"

This is what inspiration means through the educational policies of the FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, the education policies of our Honourable Prime Minister and the FijiFirst Government inspires people. I came across another random incident whereby I was at a Barber Shop and the person sitting next to me was having a haircut and conversing with the barber. To my understanding, his profession was that of a security officer and he was sharing how Toppers Schemes and TELS Scheme actually fulfilled his dream, and his children's dream of getting educated without him worrying at any single moment of forking out expenses for his children's education.

Madam Speaker, these are simple but yet very inspirational and very exemplary incidents of how the Government incentives in terms of education helps the people of our nation.

Madam Speaker, generally the role of any government is to implement strategies and policies. However, the FijiFirst Government's implementation and strategies inspire. There exists a deep sense of love and care for its people when it comes to providing the so-many educational incentives the Government implements for the people of this nation, the \$1 billion allocation speaks for itself.

Madam Speaker, it surprises and shocks me as a person from the education background, education career when I got to hear certain comments made from the other side of the House. Few of the words they have used to describe over the years in regards to the educational policies are words such as freebies.

Madam Speaker, I say this, what freebies are they talking about? Providing bus fares to school children is a freebie? Subsidising of 100 percent basic primary and school education is a freebie? Having a fair scholarship and tertiary education irrespective of race, skin colour and ethnic background is a freebie? No, Madam Speaker, they are simply wrong. This is not a freebie, it is love and care.

Madam Speaker, the current leader of SODELPA Party went about claiming recently that it was his government that implemented the free education system. If that is the case, then how come I and the hundreds and thousands of students schooling during his days of leadership never benefitted from their so-called proclaimed educational policies, the free educational policies.

The answer yet again is a big 'No'. They did not implement it, it was only the Bainimarama-led Government through the Honourable Prime Minister's leadership of love and care for the children of this nation, realised how important free and fair access to education is because he implemented this.

Madam Speaker, our Honourable Prime Minister is a loving and caring individual. He blends these important emotive traits in his leadership. He ensures that the greatest resources of our nation which is human resources, have vast, fair and easy access to education. The Honourable Prime Minister, together with the financial implementation from the Honourable Minister for Economy, has always given utmost priority for education to live in modern Fiji.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the essence of education has continued to be seen as an essential component on the increased amount the FijiFirst Government has continued to spend on it. This increased spending encouraged the students of Fiji in primary schools, high schools, universities and, of course, early childhood and special schools.

The value that the Government gives to spending in education encourages children to live a better life. It also takes away many financial burden from their parents and guardians on a daily basis. Therefore, education always carries great importance in the present Fijian economy due to the many incentives provided under the leadership of the Bainimarama-led Government.

I salute the Honourable Prime Minister for continuously recognising how important education is for our nation, and also the Honourable Minister for Economy for a record breaking allocation in this budget year. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Youths and Sports to have the floor.

HON. I. DELANA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to support the 2018-2019 National Budget tabled before this august House.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Budget as pro-youth and pro-sports as announced by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy. As our Prime Minister, the Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama had said, “This is a bold, imaginative and comprehensive Budget which sets Fiji for a wonderful year.”

A large part of the Ministry’s increase of \$7.5 million is aimed at sports development and Fiji’s international sports participation, as we seek to put Fiji in a more prominent position across a number of sports on the international stage.

Madam Speaker, as a sportsperson myself, although now retired, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Government for the \$120,000 grant to be allocated to promote physical activity and inclusive sports participation for our persons with disabilities. Our Constitution envisages a Fiji which is inclusive, where every person is equally valued and we believe this initiative will entrench social inclusion through sports.

As we move to address the disability stereotypes, this will encourage mainstreaming of sportspeople with a disability into our abled-bodied and hearing federations. It will ensure that sportspeople with a disability are acknowledged as sportspeople first and foremost. This will certainly complement the Disability Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which we use as our guiding principles.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry acknowledges our national sports organisations that promote inclusive sports, particularly Athletics Fiji and Fiji Table Tennis Association. We continue to support their progress to achieve inclusive sports participation and encourage other sports federations to follow suit. Our sportspersons with disabilities are sportsperson first and foremost.

Through an initiative by my Ministry, we have been able to apply successfully for a grant to promote physical education for students with a disability which has been managed by the Fiji National Sports Commission. I am delighted that we are close to having a basic curriculum for physical education for our students with disabilities. This has been developed with expertise from Australia and through working with our local experts, the teachers, carers and parents in Fiji. This focuses not only on our specialised schools but also on how to ensure students with disabilities in our mainstream schools are included in physical education. This will be managed, going forward by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, in co-operation with the stakeholders involved in developing this curriculum.

The unique ability of sports to transcend linguistic, cultural and social barriers makes it an excellent platform for strategies of inclusion and adaptation. Furthermore, the universal popularity of sport and its physical, social and economic development benefits make it an ideal tool for fostering the inclusion and wellbeing of persons with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, we know that persons with disabilities often face societal barriers and disability evokes negative perceptions and discrimination in many societies. This is partly through lack of exposure of persons with disabilities, fear of difference and attitudinal barriers, which frankly need to change.

As a result of this stigma associated with disability, persons with disabilities are sometimes excluded from education, employment and community life which deprives us of opportunities essential to our social development, health and wellbeing. In some societies, person with disabilities are considered dependent and seen as incapable, thus fostering inactivity which often causes individuals with physical disabilities to experience restricted mobility beyond the cause of their disability.

This is compounded by the lack of knowledge of some involved in our sports and education system on how to open up and include persons with disabilities. All we need is a bit of imagination and an open mind to have a major and positive impact on people with disabilities. Adapting physical education and physical activity to the disabled community while including those with disabilities, also serves to educate those without disabilities.

Imagine if one day, Madam Speaker, we all put on a blindfold and have to navigate our way around this august House for the day. How will we read our speeches in this Budget debate?

Certainly, we will learn to rely on others who will help to guide us around the physical spaces. However, the thing which will have the greatest impact is that, we will appreciate the barriers, both physical and attitudinal, that persons with disabilities experience everyday of their lives.

Sports can help reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with disability, Madam Speaker, because it can transform community attitudes about persons with disabilities by highlighting their skills and reducing the tendency to see the disability, instead of the person.

Through sport, persons without disabilities interact with persons with disabilities in a positive context, forcing them to reshape assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do.

This should not just be restricted to sports, Madam Speaker, but should and must extend to every walk of life, to every part of our country and throughout our economy. There is no doubt that given the opportunity, as I have been lucky to have persons with disabilities willingly contribute to building the economy and making our society stronger.

Madam Speaker, the power of sport has a transformative tool is of particular importance for women as women with disabilities often experience double discrimination on the basis of their gender and disability.

It is reported that 93 percent of women with disabilities are not involved in physical activity, and women comprise only one-third of athletes with disabilities in international competitions. By having an inclusive approach and by providing women with disabilities the opportunity to compete and demonstrate their physical ability, sports can help to reduce gender stereotypes and negative perceptions associated with women with disabilities. I sincerely thank the Government of the day for this and look forward to further developments in this area.

Moreover, by improving the inclusion and wellbeing of persons with disabilities, sports can also help to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, sports-based opportunities can help achieve the goal of good health and wellbeing by increasing physical activity, mental and physical wellbeing of all parts of our communities.

Madam Speaker, SDG4 talks about quality education and this can be supported by reducing stigma preventing children with disabilities from attending school. Promoting gender equality will be achieved by empowering women and girls with disabilities to acquire health information, skills, social networks and leadership experience; and lead to increased employment and lower levels of poverty and hunger (SDGs 1, 2, 8 and 10) by helping to reduce stigma and increase self-confidence.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also committed to provide “inclusion” meaning access for all in all sporting activities and facilities. It means recognising differences between individuals/groups and providing opportunities for them to participate regardless of those differences. This is achieved through the continual adaptation and innovation of sports and recreation programmes and services. We closely work with the Fiji National Sports Commission and our national sports organisation to deliver more diverse participation options, for example, new environments, scheduling variations, sport production variations, new pursuits, and be more inclusive of low participation groups.

Madam Speaker, social inclusion is about making sure everyone is able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society. It is also about acceptance and equal treatment of members of the wider community regardless of their gender, gender identity, sexuality, age, disability, religious or cultural background or other attributes that may lead to people feeling excluded or isolated.

Social inclusion is about changing the culture and structure of sports to ensure that it becomes equally accessible to all members of society, whatever their age, ability, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality or social/economic status. It is about working with people who are disadvantaged, disconnected from society or living with a disability.

Sports also has a positive impact on anti-social behaviour, youth violence and crime can be used as a diversion of crime or as a “hook” to bring participants into a wider and more productive range of activities. Sport interventions help to reduce youth violence by developing trust within communities. With the Police and schools, sports helps to build respect, self-esteem and inclusion of participants, distract them from violence and provide opportunities to engage in education, gaining professional qualification or entering employment.

Other ongoing sports initiatives, Madam Speaker, included in this Budget are to be commended. I would like to mention the engagement of international coaches. Our nation has been benefitting in terms of improving performances and keeping consistency with the sound technical expertise we are receiving from international coaches. It is not just about rugby as the Ministry has seen an improvement and progress in, in many other sports. The Ministry through the national sports organisation and the Fiji National Sports Commission will continue to engage international expertise to foster the development and participation of Fijians with potential at international level.

Madam Speaker, there is an ongoing allocation in this Budget to help us engage short-term experts to assist the development of so-called minor sports over a short-term period. A significant increase in this Budget bodes well for development work undertaken at grassroots by our national sports organisations. We need to see more development being undertaken not only to reduce the impact of NCDs but also to provide a more sustainable pathway for athletes with potential.

We need far more focus on identifying talent and nurturing it without burning it out. However, Madam Speaker we need to ensure that our parents support young talented athletes and do not push them too hard and in some instances, embarrass them by their behaviour at the side of the field. Parents should be mindful that they like teachers and our elite athletes are role models and that we need positive role models. It is not acceptable to have an athlete, in the heat of the moment, hit another athlete.

With the high level of violence against women, children and the vulnerable people in our society, we can and must do so much better. I welcome the ongoing opportunity given to our young athletes to take up scholarships to pursue further development overseas often while studying at great universities. This is good for improving results in both sport and academic studies, ensuring there is indeed life after sport. I am delighted that this involves cooperation between the Sports Commission and the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee to ensure that we are able to support as many athletes as possible in this new initiative.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Youth and Sports in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts promotes physical education and physical activity at a young age. We need to promote physical literacy through physical education more systematically as part of early childhood development since students spend a substantial amount of time at school. I am also delighted that the Ministry of Education is finalising a policy on Quality Physical Education as this will add impetus to our sports as well as our NCDs agenda.

Last month, Madam Speaker, we organised the National Sports and Wellness Day across all Divisions in over 40 venues throughout the country in our pursuit to administer the theme for this year "*A Healthy Fiji starts with you*". I thank the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Fiji Sports Association and National Olympic Committee and other stakeholders for their collaboration which bodes well for the future as we join forces to fight NCDs. The Olympic Day Fun Run and other activities in Suva alone attracted 400 people – including 2 Permanent Secretaries but, unfortunately, no MPs. The challenge now is how to translate this into a daily activity rather than an annual one, all the more as there is no longer a public holiday associated with this.

We will also ensure, Madam Speaker, that we improve governance practices in our sports organisation to unleash the full potential of sports and achieve desired results in a consistent manner based on organisational values and accepted social norms. As sports administrators, we need to promote and protect the integrity of sports and enhance the experience of participants. To this end, a small grant has been allocated to developing our sports governance systems.

This, Madam Speaker, will be supported by the National Sports and Physical Activity policy which we hope to finalise in the new financial year. This has been an open and inclusive process with Fijians being able to contribute via a survey run last year through our website and individual face-to-face interviews. We are now going to take the draft policy out to stakeholders in sports, our partner Ministries and other interested parties to ensure the final product meets the needs of Fiji.

While I have spoken a lot on the issue of sports, Madam Speaker, I would also like to address the issue of our youth agenda. As the Honourable Minister has said on numerous occasions, we are the Ministry for all youth. We continue to focus on reaching the unreached and, like the Minister, I have over the past four years, spent time meeting youth clubs particularly in our rural areas, have listened and followed up on the issues raised.

We have worked with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to ensure that our staff out in the field are empowered to address issues of gender discrimination and domestic violence. We continue to do this work with the Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights manual and training we have developed.

Madam Speaker, we provide the first contact and training for our young people in rural and urban areas to address their short-term skills deficits. This empowers them with knowledge in line with our stated aim of becoming a knowledge-based society. It ensures that our young people are able to follow their dreams – either by moving from subsistence to semi-commercial activities, to further study in the formal education context or simply get a job.

We welcome the recent initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture to focus on youth and women and we look forward to deepening the cooperation which exists. My Ministry has been working closely at the District and Divisional levels with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Fisheries to ensure we help to increase the number of young people involved in food production but with the by-product of reducing the average age of our farmers.

This is essential, Madam Speaker, to ensure we contribute through the youth sector to food security. We need to identify niche markets based on soil compatibility to see if we can regain our export market ability in areas such as vanilla, cocoa, ginger and other products.

We need to ensure that the youth appreciate that in expanding land for farming, we need to address re-forestation in cooperation with the Ministry of Forests. This is essential to address our carbon footprint but also to preserve wood for our future needs. We learnt, to our cost, during the *TC Winston* that we need more trees to re-build in the instance where we are affected again by a severe cyclone. We pray to God that that does not happen.

There is much still do to do in both the areas of youth and sports. We can only do this when we work closely as a team across ministries. We cannot afford to work in our silos. Our people demand that we work in cooperation to meet their needs and desires. I am delighted that the Budget contributes to cross-ministry cooperation and it is up to us in this Government to ensure that happens.

Madam Speaker, I wish to reiterate that this Budget is pro-youth and pro-sports. Sports have a positive impact in society and our nation. This Budget will promote and safeguard the current sports development structures and harness the social function of sport. No doubt it will foster a better society through the potential of sports and expand the positive impact of sports on people and society. These realistic proposals will enhance the practical steps undertaken by the Ministry and its statutory authorities to promote the regular practice of physical and sporting activities throughout life. This Budget will undoubtedly deliver for our youth. In doing so, it will contribute to our continued economic growth that has been the hallmark of this successful Government.

Madam Speaker, I therefore fully support the 2018-2019 Budget. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen: I rise to give my response to the Budget Address delivered by the Honourable Minister for Economy, Aiyaz-Sayed Khaiyum, in this August House on 28th June, 2018.

Madam Speaker, when I perused the Honourable Minister of Economy's speech, I discovered that the words "Fijian families" or "family" appeared 47 times in the speech. It was a deliberate action by the Government to convince the people of this country that they are cared. We are saying

that the Government through this Budget does not care about you. I urge you to read between the lines and try to find the truth. We will work with you to uncover the truth because only the truth will set us free.

From the outset, Madam Speaker, I want to state that on the total estimated expenditure of \$4,652,546,000, the fund under RIE is \$2,150,481,964 which is 46 percent of the total estimated expenditure. This fund, Madam Speaker, is parked in the Ministry of Economy and comes directly under its Minister. When this is added to the funds allocated to the Honourable Minister of Economy under the various ministries, it totalled \$3,542,999,876.

In other words, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Economy controls \$3,542,999,876 or 76 percent of the total budget. The other Ministers are responsible for the balance of \$1,109,606,124. So if a Honourable Minister wishes to access funds under Requisition, he has to fulfil the requirements. Under normal circumstances, Madam Speaker, only project funds should be under Requisition. Funds for administrative and operational activities should come directly under the line Minister. But this is not so, Madam Speaker.

There are several reasons why the funds Under Requisition (R) cannot be released immediately when required by the line Minister. It can be either because the requirements are not fulfilled or there is a cash flow problem.

Climate Adaptation and Mitigation: Madam Speaker, I am reminded of the words of the late Mahatma Gandhi when he said, and I quote:

“The earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So, we have to handover to them at least as it was handed over to us”.

The Government spends \$650 million this year to ensure that the Fijian economy is engineered to weather any storm. Madam Speaker, considering the availability of building materials and the timeline for processing projects, it is unlikely that the total fund will be spent this year.

Madam Speaker, it is becoming obvious that FijiFirst will be on record for being the Government that has mismanaged and abused its position as a Government with respect to the administration of our land, forests and environment. Under their leadership, the blatant disregard for conscious decision-making to protect our land and foreshore that provide food source to the Fijian people, the blatant disregard for proper feasibility studies for development and the blatant greed for economic returns and aspiration to create a modern economy has made them so blind to the effects of their decisions on our people and our future generations.

The recently announced 2018-2019 Budget, Madam Speaker, said it all. I am convinced and truly believe, Madam Speaker, that the FijiFirst Government portrays a different picture of our domestic situation at international level.

I am also honoured and fortunate, Madam Speaker, to be part of the delegation to the COP23 Meeting in Bonn last year, where our Honourable Prime Minister chaired the various Committee Meetings that took place at the Conference.

I took time, Madam Speaker, to visit some of the venues or countries such as Peru, Indonesia and some African countries and observed how they incorporated their traditional knowledge of their indigenous people in their policies in fighting climate change. The Government should take the same

initiatives and work with the *iTaukei* people of this country and draw from their knowledge to help fight climate change.

The Government, Madam Speaker, should be seen to be taking every step and left no stone unturned in its quest to fight climate change. This is a national and global issue, Madam Speaker, it is not a political issue. The *Talanoa* Session that has been adopted by the world community should start at home.

Madam Speaker, I remain convinced that we somehow did not reflect truly the challenges that we are facing at home in the government policies and actions.

Ministry of Forestry: Madam Speaker, the Ministry has a budgetary allocation of \$17.1 million, \$12.6 million goes to Operating Costs whilst a mere \$3.8 million is set for Capital Expenditure. When we look at the allocated budget in summary, one thing is very clear, Madam Speaker, this Government does not “walk the talk” when it comes to environmental preservation.

Trees and plants are crucial to the environment. That is why the world is promoting reforestation to be able to mitigate climate change and assist prevent damages like soil erosion as well to continue to provide habitats for living organisms. The commercial benefits with regards to timber and other value-added products that come out of trees and plants are something that is widely acclaimed.

It thus boggles the mind when we look at the Budget provision, Madam Speaker, and note for new initiatives. They only have three budgeted initiatives which are:

1. Provisions for salaries and wages;
2. Purchase of a portable x-ray fluorescent spectrometer and other equipment to support research on timber utilisation and product development; and
3. the \$100,000 allocation for studies on Silviculture and the development of Forestry Seed Banks.

For other ongoing initiatives, they have given \$250,000 towards Reforestation of Indigenous Forests. A very measly \$700,000, Madam Speaker, is being provided for the Reforestation of Degraded Forests.

Apart for that, Madam Speaker, the rest of the funds provided seem to be for Development of Sites for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation, Upgrading of Forest Parks like Colo-i-Suva and supporting communities for Purchase of Equipment of Forestry-Based Schemes.

Madam Speaker, the Budget says it all. There is no real genuine intent by this Government to look after our forestry sector. The funding being provided for reforestation compared to the rate of deforestation will soon show.

I am on record today to say that in the future with more development and commercial activities taking place, increased flooding, soil erosion, landslide and possible earthquakes will become a reality because we are using up our forests more than we are replacing them. It is a dangerous trend, Madam Speaker, and shows very clearly that the Fiji Government does not care.

Madam Speaker, recently, we have had debates about the approvals given by Government in certain areas.

The Bauxite Mining in Bua, for example, especially its effects on the environment was debated. As part of the rehabilitation of land, Government saw to it that pine planting was done by the Chinese contractors in Nawailevu.

It has been scientifically proven, Madam Speaker, that pine trees produce hydrojuglone, which is converted to an allelotoxin when it is exposed to oxygen. The roots, decomposing leaves, and twigs of pine trees are known to release juglone into the surrounding soil which inhibits the growth of many other plants, especially those in the Solanaceae's family like tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and eggplants.

I am told, Madam Speaker, that in areas where pine had been grown have noted challenges with respect to plants and vegetables.

The people of Bua are worried of the same and questions have been raised to Government: Was pine the only alternative for land rehabilitation in this post bauxite mining area, Madam Speaker?

I shudder to think in years to come, Madam Speaker, the people of Bua will find they have become victims of the FijiFirst Government's greed for revenue and economic development that will build a modern economy.

After all, Madam Speaker, they have shown their hand when they had directed the raw materials from the bauxite mining to be processed in Fiji. This was after two years of actual soil being shipped off to China by the investors.

The mahogany and pine industries, Madam Speaker, were the initiative of the Ratu Mara Government. This Government has never developed a venture of this magnitude. They just came in, harvested the plantations, and never bothered to follow up or to want to know and understand the background to these projects, the partnership of the Government and the landowners in the establishment of these projects and more importantly, the goodwill of the landowners in giving their land to Government for long term lease at peppercorn rent.

The plantation at Nukurua in Vugalei, Tailevu is almost all harvested, Madam Speaker. The landowners are still living in their old houses in their villages and nothing much has changed. When the industry started, there were only two stakeholders, the Government and the landowners. When harvesting time comes, the number of stakeholders suddenly increased; the loggers, transport owners, millers, exporters, et cetera, but the landowners were nowhere to be seen. The new stakeholders had made their millions and moved on. The Sustainable Mahogany Industry (SMI) that was allocated to buy the bulk of the Grade 1 mahogany and make guitars had closed down their operations at Rovodrau in Navua and gone back. The executives could be somewhere in the Bahamas or Jamaica strumming their guitars.

With the Pine Scheme in Lakeba, Madam Speaker, it has been in the Budget for the last two years but nothing had been done till today. The allocation is under requisition (R) and hopefully the project would be implemented this year.

On the distribution of dividends to pine landowners last year, Madam Speaker, a total of \$7 million was distributed. The landowners in the Western Division were paid \$168 per hectare. When the distribution was made at Vesidrua Village in Seaqqa for landowners in the Northern Division, the landowners from the Tikina of Sasa and Namuka in Macuata were not paid.

They were told that their plantations were too far and uneconomical to take their pine to Nabouwalu for processing. This is none of their fault, Madam Speaker. If the Fiji Pine thinks that taking the pine to Nabouwalu for processing is uneconomical, then they should upgrade the mill at Malau to process the pine logs from Macuata. They have not been paid their dues till today.

Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources: Madam Speaker, the Ministry has a total allocation of \$37.5 million. Of these, a total of \$14.2 million is allocated for Capital Expenditure:

1.	State Land Administration	-	\$2.9 million;
2.	Oil and Mines Administration	-	\$918,400;
3.	Survey & Geospatial Information Management	-	\$6.6 million; and
4.	Valuation	-	\$6.3 million;

The Ministry can hardly engage in any meaningful development with this Budget, Madam Speaker. I have already mentioned that only funds for capital projects can be held under requisition (R).

Madam Speaker, the Municipal Council rates for Crown Land, iTLTB and annuity payments, *iTaukei* lands leased to State and renewal for native leases were held under (R).

Madam Speaker, the above funds should not be held under (R) as they have to be paid in time. The payment of rates for Crown Lands if paid before 31st January qualifies for 10 percent discount. The payments were late and the Ministry lost out on the 10 percent discount. The Ministry could have saved thousands of dollars.

The Audit Report, Madam Speaker, has uncovered many issues on the administration of State lands. The arrears of lease rental is unprecedented. It has reached a record high of \$27 million.

New Ministry of Waterways and Environment: It is encouraging, Madam Speaker, to note that the Ministry of Waterways and the Department of Environment have merged. We are told that taking this function under the same umbrella will make funding projects easier and get projects completed more quickly.

Madam Speaker, Irrigation and Flood Protection has been allocated \$54.2 million. This is all under requisition (R), Madam Speaker.

On the Environment Management, Madam Speaker, it is allocated \$14.2 million and is also under requisition (R). How can then, Madam Speaker, will it make funding projects easier and gets completed more quickly if the line Minister does not administer his own funds? The Minister for Economy will still control the funds and nothing will change.

Madam Speaker, considering that this is a new Ministry and he has to deal with specific projects which have to undertake planning, capital purchase and the whole approval process, it is evidently clear that most of these funds will not be utilised in this budget year and we will continue to be faced with flooding and environmental issues if the weather pattern does not change.

The allocation of \$43.6 million to protect Fijian communities and families from water inundation by improving drainage systems within towns and cities, maintaining municipal council drainage systems and constructing sea walls, drone and wave break water for villages and communities faced with the threat of coastal erosion is most welcomed.

On the allocation of \$3.8 million for the Maintenance of Drainage in Municipal Councils, Madam Speaker, I think that this allocation is to be diverted to other projects. I say this, Madam Speaker, because residents and businesses of every municipal council pay rates to the councils. This money is used for capital projects and maintenance of infrastructure. Madam Speaker, now that the Government carries out repairs and maintenance of all roads within municipalities, the municipal councils should have enough money to look after their own drainage system.

It raises the question, Madam Speaker, that the Government should allow the Municipal Elections to take place and empower the ratepayers to administer their own municipal councils and manage their own affairs.

A recent newspaper survey, Madam Speaker, showed that most of the general public that took part in the poll were in favour of the proposals.

I noted, Madam Speaker, that \$1 million has been allocated to standardise rubbish bins across the country, first starting with Nasinu. Why Nasinu, may I ask? Because Nasinu is the most populated area in the country and most of the voters live there. To the residents of Nasinu, I want to tell you this, you deserve more than rubbish bins.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- When we deal with development on land, one of the fundamental aspects that will need to be done is an Environmental Impact Assessment to examine the impacts.

The Ministry of Housing and Community Development, Madam Speaker, according to Section 35 (1) of the 2013 Constitution, and I quote:

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

The creation of the new Ministry, Madam Speaker, is a positive move towards achieving this objective.

I note, Madam Speaker, that the budgetary allocation is \$41.4 million. Madam Speaker, \$2.1 million is allocated for General Administration and \$39.2 million is allocated for Housing and Community Development.

Madam Speaker, approximately 30,000 people work in the public sector and given the short-term employment contracts civil servants now have, it would be impossible to get a loan from lending institution to buy land. The Ministry should be allocated more money if it is to achieve its goal.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, is purported to be a family budget. We all care for all the families of Fiji but it is important to tell them the truth. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Assistant Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment to have the floor.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members: I rise in support of the 2018-2019 Budget, in particular the activities to be undertaken under the budget allocated to the Ministry of Environment.

Madam Speaker, I am sure everyone in this House will agree that there is an increasing global interest and recognition of Fiji's economic growth. What is also true, is that the development pathway is increasingly being driven by a global shift towards sustainable green and blue economies.

Madam Speaker, contrary to Honourable Dulakiverata's belief, this Government will continue to establish strong and sustainable resilience for every Fijian.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L. EDEN.- The Sustainable Development Goals have been and will continue to set our key objectives that will help us achieve the resilience that we seek.

This Budget reflects the Government's unwavering commitment to an indelible, transformative development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. As this Government strives to build a strong climate resilient economy, it is of paramount importance that we continue to build on a foundation that accords a well-protected, healthy and valuable environment. This, Madam Speaker, will no doubt afford us with a strong, prosperous and inclusive growth for all Fijians.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, lays out the trajectory to bolstering scientific, technological and innovative programmes. These programmes cannot be run on their own entirely and will be catalysed through strategic partnerships with international agencies and the private sector. This will be led by a strong government backed with policy and a tenacious, regulatory system.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Environment is responsible for protecting and conserving Fiji's natural environment, which includes air, land, water, all layers of the atmosphere, all organic and inorganic matter or living organisms, and the interacting natural or human systems that encompass all of this.

The Ministry will continue to raise awareness and educate all Fijians towards the need to protect and conserve our environment and its natural assets. The Ministry will focus on showcasing the all-important role that our natural assets play in slowing down the disastrous impacts of climate change. The Ministry will also instil the need to keep poisonous materials like plastic out of our environment. This way, our natural assets like our corals, our mangroves, sea grass and the precious marine and freshwater life and our much threatened native tree species are not only protected but also guided through a pathway to flourish.

While we educate and raise awareness, we will also ensure compliance is maintained. Madam Speaker, awareness and education demands responsibility. The Ministry will carry out its mandate through the strict enforcement of the Environment Management Act and other associated regulations like the Environment Management (EIA) Regulations, the Environment Management (Waste Disposal and Recycling) Regulations, the Ozone Depleting Substances Regulations, the Endangered and Protected Species Act, and the Litter Act.

The Ministry has also maximised the effectiveness of monitoring, compliance and reporting by forming partnerships with other Ministries and Government agencies and providing training for their teams based across Fiji to monitor and report breaches against Environment Management Laws. The Ministry is also entering into the drone surveillance era through the effective deployment of drones to monitor and report environmentally illegal activities.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will also be responsible for fulfilling Fiji's obligation under regional and international environment-related treaties, conventions and protocols that Fiji is a party to. These include the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Also, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species, the Convention of Migratory Species, the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Waigani Convention.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will take a pragmatic approach for the fiscal year 2018-2019. Firstly, the Ministry will ensure that there is continuity in the good work carried out over the past year. The Ministry will facilitate and support a strong community outreach model involving all citizenry groups, including businesses on the environment protection agenda and regulatory obligations. This is important in every sphere of our nation's existence and future. We believe that this approach will play a crucial role, creating greater green investment, more jobs and increase Fiji's competitiveness in the global arena.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the Ministry will continue to build and enhance a coherent, effective and robust regulatory and compliance system. Madam Speaker, this approach will support outreach and awareness, while ensuring strong monitoring and reporting systems. To realise the benefits of environment protection, it is imperative that a strong-willed approach is taken towards compliance, both within the environment and within our conservation areas. This approach has so far led us on a path of strategic justice to our environment.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank this House and all other citizens, who have shown an increased awareness and interest in our environment, especially those who have stopped bad habits and become environmentally friendly, and those who have reported illegal activities being undertaken around our country. This support is invaluable and very much appreciated.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, to avail the best possible outcomes, the Ministry will continue to deploy a relationship management dimension. The Ministry will build on the successes around the recent NGO/CSO roundtables, and this will be extended to the business segments in Fiji as well. This will help cement a well-planned coordinated strategy, to share and support the Ministry in its policy and action.

The Ministry will also strengthen the existing 3R programmes (Reduce, Recycle and Reuse), and this will establish a stronger waste management, and pollution control strategy for Fiji.

Speaking of waste management, Madam Speaker, Stage 2 - Cell 3 of the Naboro Landfill is expected to be completed in about nine months at a cost of \$3.3 million. The Ministry will work closely with the Ministry of Local Government and the Rural Authority to ensure that waste is managed appropriately within their jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, in response to comments made by the Honourable Aseri Radrodro this morning regarding garbage collection sites, I am pleased to advise that \$1 million has been allocated to the standardisation of skip bins countrywide. This, Honourable Dulakiverata, will greatly enhance and streamline collection services, at the same time making the process more economically viable, and efficient.

Another initiative that will be piloted in the Nasinu area is the distribution of compost bins. Training on best use practices and benefits of composting will also be carried out, with the aim to encourage more of our citizens to participate and ultimately create back yard organic and healthy

farming for generations to come. This practice will also reduce the amount of garbage that would generally end up in our landfill, which in turn increases the life span of the landfill in the long run.

Our Ministry will also keep up the momentum and action to address plastic pollution. In response to the existing situation, our Government will explore and establish reduction of plastic bags and straws and control the use of single use plastic bottles.

The Ministry recently launched a pledge of “No Straw Use” with school children throughout schools in Fiji. The current 10 cent levy on single use plastic bags will increase to 20 cents, and I would like to stress, Madam Speaker, that the aim of this levy is to discourage the use of plastic bags and encourage our citizens to use re-usable bags instead of plastic bags. The next logical step will be to ban these single use plastic bags and straws all together, and that will come in the not too distant future.

The Ministry will continue to carry out outreach programmes that will establish conservation throughout Fiji. This will include the implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan. The Ministry has embarked on an exercise to extract a quantified and tangible picture linking conservation and climate resilience. For example, Madam Speaker, quantifying the amount of mangroves, sea meadows, and an indicative idea on corals, within our coastal zones. This will greatly assist in understanding climate change adaptation for our coastal cities, towns and communities, including Fiji’s mitigation potential.

The very fact that we are quantifying our National Environmental Assets will also speak volumes into the proposed financial modelling, like insurance against natural catastrophes. To explain this in simpler terms, Madam Speaker, it is a well-known fact that wetland systems, like corals and mangroves, reduce the impact from strong wave action associated with cyclones. When calculating an insurance premium, these ecosystem service assets can be factored in as well.

Madam Speaker, to ensure all of this, including the provision of fast, efficient, and reliable services to the public, the Ministry has reviewed its systems, standard operating procedures, and team structure. These systems will be applied in the coming year and will ensure improved service delivery, with highly capable personnel within their areas of expertise, that are required to carry out the Ministry’s mandate for this fiscal year.

Madam Speaker, this Budget is a well thought out, well-planned, inclusive and responsible Budget, that covers a broad spectrum, in a truly sustainable fashion.

One point I would like to highlight, Madam Speaker, and something that our Honourable Prime Minister and our Honourable Minister for Economy have stressed time and time again, is the fact that our borrowings are never used for operational needs, but rather for much needed infrastructure that unfortunately was horrendously neglected by past leadership.

Like in any business, Madam Speaker, a continued maintenance and progression programme is key, but sadly, this was not the case in the past. Our Government, Madam Speaker, has corrected that.

In closing, I would like to commend our Honourable Prime Minister and our Honourable Minister for Economy and his team, for their leadership and forward thinking, which will take Fiji into a stable, and sustainable future for us all.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon Honourable Viliame Gavoka to take the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of the House: I rise to make my contribution to the Budget that was presented here on Thursday 28th June, 2018 by the Honourable Minister of Economy.

Madam Speaker, the 2018-2019 Budget is being touted as a budget for the families of Fiji. When the Honourable Minister was making his speech, according to my colleague, Honourable Dulakiverata, he referred to the families about 40 times and of course there are billboards all over Fiji saying “All Fijian Families Matter”. And we are told that after this Budget, there is going to be a roadshow to share this Budget with the families of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, strategically and tactically all is tied nicely into the FijiFirst campaign of 2018 and I must say the payback from Qorvis is in spades.

That is why, Madam Speaker, I am a bit mystified as to this infatuation with the Leader of the SODELPA Party. He was only making some preliminary comment and yet, FijiFirst is trembling with fear.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Trembling with fear!

He has not even started campaigning, he had just made some comments on the side and everywhere the FijiFirst people talk, it is always “him”. Imagine when he starts campaigning in earnest, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we know on this side of the House that the shift in sentiment is seismic from FijiFirst to SODELPA. Maybe, they know that, and this has called on a pre-emptive strike on their part.

What is obvious, Madam Speaker, is that the Budget is deceptive and full of fluff. And it is interesting that the Honourable Minister use the words like; “Father Christmas”, “freebies” and “gimmicks” in his speech which is exactly how the people of Fiji view the way FijiFirst provides stewardship in this country. We, at SODELPA, Madam Speaker, would call on FijiFirst to stop all these charade and tell the Fijian families the truth.

My colleague, the Honourable Dulakiverata, has highlighted that scrutiny of this Budget, Madam Speaker, indicated 46 percent of the Budget is under RIE, “requisition”. In layman’s terms what it means is that, it may happen, it will not happen.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Parmod Chand has highlighted a number of projects that were in the Budget that did not happened. The people of Navutulevu were promised a playground, but nothing has happened. Horses were promised in Naitasiri, nothing was delivered. So really, Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji deserved to be told the truth.

Madam Speaker, generally RIE is in Head 50 or Miscellaneous and in the SDL Government, only \$67 million was in Head 50. With FijiFirst, it is about \$900 million. So you see the difference in the way we manage things. Other Governments were honest with the people but not FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, perhaps there are some issues in here that they need to be honest with, is it a cashflow problem? And my colleague, the Honourable Aseri Radrodro had today spoken on the debt, that \$6,500 is on the head of every man, woman and children in this country, may be that is the problem.

Today, Madam Speaker, we are told that foreign reserves are high and sitting at \$2.2 billion, but this can easily evaporate. The geopolitics of today, Madam Speaker, is affecting world oil prices. FijiFirst has been lucky that during its tenure, the oil prices has been as low as \$40 a barrel. But it is going back upwards, Madam Speaker, and one-third of our imports are petroleum products (\$900 million), so this can evaporate very, very easily.

Madam Speaker, if you look at the deficit or the difference between import and export, by 2019 it will be \$3.3 billion. So really, the reserves, the highly liquidity are under threat and they can easily evaporate overnight.

Madam Speaker, we must prepare ourselves for some hard times and I say hard times, more hard times because life has been hard under FijiFirst.

Madam Speaker, the Household and Income Expenditure Report of 2014 is very worrying. The survey indicated that 28.4 percent live below the poverty line and 21.6 percent are on the margin; meaning that 50 percent of the people are having a hard time in this country, and that is about 465,000 people. That is a lot of people, Madam Speaker, and this significant number now explains why the multitude - sleep overnight in Nadi's Prince Charles Park, overnight in Nadroga and Lautoka in anticipation of the 'freebies' from FijiFirst.

When you see those numbers, those multitudes, it is very difficult to buy into the contention by the Honourable Prime Minister that Fiji has never been prosperous. Never been prosperous? Look at the faces of all those people! And when they get interviewed by the media, foremost in their comment is poverty and how hard life is.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister spent a bit of time on technology and the Apps. In SODELPA, we want first things first, bread and butter. And on this, Madam Speaker, for SODELPA, we will zero-rate VAT on basic need food items. SODELPA will do that.

Madam Speaker, the Consumer Price Index justifies the hardship brought about by the cost of living. You know that TEBUTT carried out a survey lately and 50 percent of the people talked about the cost of food, 31 percent talked about unemployment and 28 percent talked about wages. Madam Speaker, this behoves us to create more employment, especially with the shift in the urban areas.

Madam Speaker, a phenomena today with building contractors is, they cannot complete a house on time, and this is true today. If you want to build a house, they cannot do it on time. There is a shortage of skilled labours. Asking the question; what have you been doing FijiFirst? Where are all the skilled workers? Why have you not trained them? Why do you not embrace the suggestion from this side to set up an education commission to determine the needs of the employer in our education system?

Of course, SODELPA will set up the tripartite machinery between the government, employers and employees to address issues relating to the labour market. My colleagues there better get used to the fact that there is a SODELPA government coming up and, Madam Speaker, SODELPA will be

very careful when we are negotiating with Exim Bank, that we do not allow them to bring their own workers into Fiji.

Madam Speaker, on wages, no amount of argument can justify the reason why the minimum wages should be at \$2.68. The FijiFirst Government, Madam Speaker, is focusing on interfering with the market to bring down the cost of goods. That is complex and difficult. The easy thing, Madam Speaker, is to bring back COLA.

Madam Speaker, basically what it is, is that the price, the wages should keep in pace with the cost of living. That is simple economics, Madam Speaker, and that is what SODELPA will do - bring back COLA and set up a proper forum to increase wages.

Madam Speaker, there is also investment. It is interesting that the economic sectors which is agriculture, fisheries, forestry, lands and mineral resources, industry and trade, tourism, sugar, public enterprises and local government only get 9 percent of the Budget. And here, we are trying to increase export but only 9 percent of the Budget is for the economic sector.

Agriculture, I am sorry to belabour the point, is a tragedy. The agricultural revolution has not happened.

Madam Speaker, in Volivoli on the road to my village near Koromumu, last month I saw this group of people, one with the bullock ploughing and people following behind him, planting the cuttings of *kumala* (sweet potatoes). I looked at it and said, it was surreal. That was reminiscent of what I saw back in the 1950s.

In this day and age, people are still planting *kumala* with bullocks? Where is the revolution that you promised? And we know, Madam Speaker, that *kumala* is the preferred food for diabetes.

For a country that has this huge problem with NCDs, we should grow more *kumala*. And the soil in Volivoli, Nasama and Vunavutu around that area is perfect for *kumala*. So, we would like to see something of a scale, that will be truly, fully revolutionary.

Madam Speaker, sugar is another tragedy. It fetched \$310 million in exports in 2006, and now \$139 million in 2016. It is very simple, Madam Speaker. We will need to listen to the stakeholders not the dictatorial way that the way that FijiFirst does it. And we are pleased that there is a stabilization price of \$85; but they eventually heard it, listening to us, but there is still room to increase this to \$100.

Madam Speaker, SODELPA will give space to the industry to do its thing, and we will provide the support that is needed.

Madam Speaker, Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), according to the Honourable Minister is selling some of its assets. Some of those assets, Madam Speaker, may be landholding, some of the best in Fiji. And the landowners today are complaining that some of that was acquired in ways that were not clear. So before we sell those land, please give the opportunity to the original owners to have a look at ways of recovering it. SODELPA will do that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, tourism is underperforming, which is also very tragic. It is the cornerstone of Fiji's social and economic development but not realising its right potential. While comparable destinations have made the million visitor mark, Fiji still in a very long way from that.

Fiji used to spend about \$25.92 to secure one visitor. As the Budget, Madam Speaker, divide by the number of visitors is your cost per visitor. In 2018, it paid \$40.87 per and still the numbers are mediocre.

Madam Speaker, the operation costs for Tourism Fiji used to be \$3 million, now it is \$10 million and nothing significant is happening. SODELPA will immediately restructure and strengthen Tourism Fiji to maximise results in this sector.

Madam Speaker, SODELPA has always ridiculed the \$9 million spent on golf. We are happy that is not happening. Eventually, someone has listened to us but imagine five years of \$9 million, \$45 million and I have said before in that vicinity, where you spend \$45 million, women are throwing the bucket into the well to pull out the water.

And in that area between Natadola and Momi, water problem is perennial. Imagine what \$45 million well-spent would have done to that area that is rife for development, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the landowners need to be paid a fair share for what they give away. Some of the leases need to be reviewed, some already dated and SODELPA will bring that back and empower iTLTB to make the changes.

Madam Speaker, the overwater bungalows, a new phenomenon, a lot of them were not paying anything on the *i qoliqoli* where they sits More is coming into Malolo. More is coming into Momi, SODELPA will make sure that the landowners make a return on that operation into eternity, not just one payment of compensation.

Madam Speaker, it is sad that I brought up the issue about Vuda Marina. The Marina in Vuda, Madam Speaker, there was a higher evaluation and the Government went to a lower valuation and the developer will now pay a lower value. And, sadly, when they wanted to protest peacefully, they were not given the permit. That is the Fiji of today, it denied the landowners their right to do what they need to do under the law.

Madam Speaker, the Surfing Decree has impoverished a lot of Villages. Momi and Nabila, they used to receive almost \$1 million a year. Now, they receive nothing, only the contractors or the operators are benefitting from the Surfing Decree.

Madam Speaker, on timber, my colleague has spoken on it. Fiji Pine was originally to return ownership to the landowners. SODELPA will do that. It is sad that FijiFirst is not considering something along those lines.

Madam Speaker, most of the land is in the hilly areas. We need to set up more Tropik Woods operation, they are very successful. Do one in Nabou in Nadroga, and you will see more land will be committed for more pine.

Madam Speaker, a lot of the natives have invested in trucks but now, they found out that they cannot operate their trucks because of some ruling by LTA. So, Madam Speaker, can we ask the Government to relook at this issue? They cannot invest so much into trucks only to be told they cannot run on the road. It is criminal, it is heartless on the part of Government not to consider their plea for some sort of support for truck owners.

Local Government, Madam Speaker, we hear that there is going to be re-planning of our local municipalities which is fine but let us make sure that the landowners are also part of the equation. What is happening today, Madam Speaker, as everyone knows, there is a huge migration from the

rural areas into the urban areas so great wealth is being created in the municipalities. You cannot just take the land from the natives and say, “go back to where you were.” They should be part of the municipalities and grow with the municipalities.

In Lautoka, Madam Speaker, we will help the people who own Lautoka City to get back their land. Madam Speaker, I am talking about the likelihood of this happening.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Knowing FijiFirst, knowing what they have done to Vuda, knowing what they have done to Momi, knowing what they have done to Tavarua, we do not trust FijiFirst.

Madam Speaker, now to communication. We welcome *Walesi*. *Walesi* is delivering to our people of Fiji but Madam Speaker, we need to be assured that *Walesi* does not impinge on the freedom and on the privacy on the people of Fiji. It is controlled by one Government, by one agency; we have to be careful of that, Madam Speaker.

On the ITC, Government is in control of the ITC now and pushing the private sector away. This is very unhealthy. I think the private sector should be part of this. Madam Speaker, FBC appears to be on a stronger footing and we just wish, Madam Speaker, they could do more local content. There is more filming in this country now, we can benefit from the expertise, we can improve the offerings in universities in this field and Madam Speaker, in no time I would urge for a huge part of their work be more of local content.

I will also speak on Foreign Affairs. We will establish an embassy in Israel. It will be in Jerusalem, the City of David, the eternal city of the people of Israel. And we will follow the Americans by setting up an embassy in there, the Knesset is there and Israel is a friend to many countries in the world and Fiji can benefit from Israel in a big way.

Madam Speaker, real issues are being ignored by FijiFirst. The families of Fiji wants to see heavy lifting to bring about real change. I have highlighted some today and it takes political will to do what FijiFirst is not prepared to do, resorting instead to misleading the people by painting a rosy picture and making outlandish claims that things have never been better.

The opposite is true and what we call on the Government is to tell the Fijian families the truth. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Attorney-General, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament: I rise to contribute to the National Budget presented to this House by the Honourable Minister for Economy on 28th June this year with a total estimated expenditure of four billion, six hundred and fifty million, five hundred and forty six thousand dollars.

I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for the Budget delivered in this House.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- But, Madam Speaker, it is my role to raise issues that are a part of the National Budget that affects the citizens of this country, even those who have chosen to make Fiji

their home. I note, Madam Speaker, with very deep concern the direction this Government is taking this nation and there is concern that its destiny is not a destiny that we would welcome. It will be a destiny of more crimes, building of more prisons and population anxiety.

For this, Madam Speaker, I would like to reflect very briefly on the budget of Fiji Corrections Service. In the 2017-2018 Budget, it was allocated with a budget of \$38,751,000 and in 2018-2019 Budget, it is allocated, Madam Speaker, with \$48,128,000; an increase of \$2,377,000. This, Madam Speaker, in relative to the Fiji Corrections Service budget, I also noticed a huge substantive increase in the budget of the Fiji Police Force. In the 2017-2018 Budget, it was allocated with \$146,891,000 and in the 2018-2019 Budget, Madam Speaker, it is being allocated with \$193,510,000. I noticed, Madam Speaker, that there is also an increase of \$14,772 in the budget of the Judiciary.

I specifically highlight these three heads, Madam Speaker, because it tells me that the Government has no clear policy on how to make Fiji a peaceful place to live in. I listened to the Honourable Minister for Defence this morning in wanting to paint a picture that Fiji would be a safe place to live in and there is security for personal safety. But the policy of this Government offers no solution to the rise in crimes but in fact it is painting the picture that the only way to keep people safe is to increase the capacity of the Judiciary, the Police Force and build more Corrections facilities. I have not seen any innovation to target the root cause of crimes in the budget presented in this House. This should see to a decrease in the budget allocation to the Corrections Service, Judiciary and Fiji Police Force.

Enacting, Madam Speaker, of Fiji Laws and imposing deterrent sentences are not going to solve the rise in crimes. This Government must acknowledge that it is the decline in moral values, Madam Speaker, which is the main cause of crimes. Unfortunately, we continue to see legislations being brought into this House that propagates the breaching of moral values.

We see in the new incentives announced for the 2018-2019 Budget, Madam Speaker, again encouraging people living in de facto relationships. We cannot continue in this direction and at the same time expect peace be to the people of this nation. It is clear that this Government does not know how to reflect good principles into its policy; that is clear.

It is also clear that this Government continues to manifest itself in its immoral and evil principles. Fiji must come away from following this direction and show the people of this nation that with righteous policies Fiji can be the envy of the world. For the last 12 years, Madam Speaker, Fiji has been enslaved by inappropriate and immoral policies and the time has come for the liberation of this nation by allowing the author of righteousness to prevail over the affairs of this nation. This nation now needs a strong and committed resort to align itself with righteousness.

Leaders must clearly demonstrate that respect is to be given to God alone and not to man. Let me, Madam Speaker, reflect on some of the specific issues that I would like to briefly discuss. The Honourable Minister for Forests indicated, Madam Speaker, and was briefly touched by the Honourable Dulakiverata, about the pine forest on Lakeba Island and also the Honourable Minister for Forests in this House had declared that the biggest pine forest in Fiji now is on the island of Lakeba in the Lau group, Madam Speaker. This cannot be disputed. The pine trees have matured and must be harvested to avoid unnecessary decline in its value.

For this to happen, Madam Speaker, it is vitally important that a new jetty be constructed in order to facilitate the ease of transporting pine products from Lakeba to the markets. In the last Budget, the Government had allocated funds for the upgrading of the jetty in Wainiyabia, Lakeba. It is now in the second consecutive Budget the announcement of upgrading the jetty in Wainiyabia is again prescribed.

The problem with the budget in respect to the jetty in Wainiyabia is that no upgrading can be carried out at the jetty in Wainiyabia because there is no jetty there. Madam Speaker, this appears again in this year's Budget. The same upgrading of jetties including other jetties in other parts of Fiji and nothing has been done, even to date because nothing can actually be done to upgrade any jetty there because there is no jetty at Wainiyabia.

It should change its prescription to state, the construction of a new jetty at Wainiyabia, not the upgrading of a jetty at Wainiyabia. Madam Speaker, I note the Honourable Prime Minister had made a very honourable promise in this Honourable House. This was during the sitting of the Committee of the Whole last year, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, if I para-phrase stated that there will be a new jetty at Wainiyabia.

Madam Speaker, I still believe the Honourable Prime Minister will carry out that honourable promise because the whole nation heard this Honourable man made the honourable promise.

(Laughter)

Thank you, Madam Speaker, but it is after a year now, no work has even started. In fact, I was present, Madam Speaker, at the *Tikina* of Lakeba Meeting called by the Divisional Planning Officer on Wednesday, 20th June, 2018 at Lakeba. I was surprised when he announced that the jetty at Wainiyabia will be constructed in 2020. I could not believe that, Madam Speaker, because the promise was made by the Honourable Prime Minister in this honourable House.

Also, Madam Speaker, I would not know at this time, whether the Honourable Prime Minister would be there in 2020. I would therefore urge the Honourable Prime Minister to fulfil that promise as soon as possible.

(Laughter)

Because, Madam Speaker, the Bible says that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh", and I take it, Madam Speaker, that that is actually what is in the heart of the honourable man.

Luke 6:45, says and I quote: "A good man out ..."

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Teach them! Teach them!

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- "... of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil, for the abundance of the heart: his mouth speaketh".

That is why I am saying, Madam Speaker, it is the honourable man's goodness in his heart, the Honourable Prime Minister speaketh. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

If I can remember correctly, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Economy and Acting Prime Minister at the time, in his answer to questions made in this Honourable House, Madam Speaker, have stated that work would start after the Budget announcement and the actual construction commencing by the end of the year. That is another honourable man, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- The pronouncement made by the Government, Madam Speaker, if it is not carried out, it will actually cause confusion because these are the two most honourable persons. They have stated this and people expect, Madam Speaker, for what they have said to come into fruition, to be fulfilled, and I believe so, that it will happen likewise, Madam Speaker.

I understand, Madam Speaker, there would not be any problem with the site of the jetty in Lakeba because the *Bose ni Tikina* and the *Bose Vanua* have already met. They have both decided and resolved that the site of the jetty would be at Wainiyabia.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- What is your interest?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Certainly, my interest is there, Madam Speaker, I am from Lakeba.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- In Savusavu?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Savusavu too.

(Laughter)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- I would urge the Government to move with certainty to see that the jetty is built as soon as possible, Madam Speaker, because the pines are already waiting to be harvested. This would be a big increase of the contribution to the economy of this nation, not only on Lakeba Island but also to the whole Lau Group and to the whole nation. No pine forest in Fiji like the one in Lakeba at the moment.

Madam Speaker, the Government sent a skidder over there to go and help in the moving of the logs. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the skidder has been sitting there for all this time since it got on to the Lakeba Island because the problem is that, there is no driver or operator to operate the machine. The decision is that if there is going to be an operator, the appointment has to be done by Government from Suva. Officials of the Lakeba Pine Scheme had gone to the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Public Service and they may have gone to the Office of the Attorney-General also...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- No, never.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Yes, I said, maybe, all right, they may not have gone there.

(Laughter)

But now, Madam Speaker, the skidder machine is still sitting over there. There are people on the Island of Lakeba to operate it but they cannot do anything about it because the decision for someone to operate that machine waits for the Government to make their decision, so it has been sitting there for all this time.

Again, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Forest is similar to the allocation under Head 32, Programme 2, Activity 7. This was in reference to the Purchasing of Harvesting Machines and Other Equipment. In the last years, officials of the Lakeba Pine Scheme had been to the Ministry of Economy; and to the government ministries in which the purpose of accessing the allocated funds all to no avail because all these funds were all under 'R' and it had not been released even up to this moment, so the fund that was allocated for had not been implemented because the fund had not been released for that purpose.

So with the level of that kind of attitude, Madam Speaker, the people are starting to wonder if the Government really cares about its commitment. Again, the decision made and the action taken would be a contributing factor to how the people will view the Government whether it really cares.

Madam Speaker, it is now starting to show if it does not do anything to fulfil those promises, the people would be thinking or form the views that the Government is only raising their hope but actually he will not fulfil what he said to them. To rebut that statement, Madam Speaker, the Government must take immediate steps now to fulfil those promises, and I hope by talking directly to the two Honourable Members in this honourable House that they will actually do what they had promised immediately. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now adjourn to enable us to have refreshment. We will return at 4.50 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.19 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.50 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, you may be seated. I now call upon the Leader of Opposition to have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Attorney-General, the Honourable Ministers and fellow Parliamentarians: Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in response to the 2018-2019 Budget and although the Honourable Minister for Economy tells us that they have achieved nine straight years of economic growth that is quite unprecedented, offering the longest running period of growth in Fijian history, we know, Madam Speaker, and the people of Fiji know that this is far from the truth.

It is our job as the Opposition to tell Fijian families the truth, that in the past twelve years of FijiFirst running the country, the GDP growth rate from December 2006 to 2018 is in reality 2.3 percent, which is the same figure that the Honourable Prime Minister gave for SODELPA Party Leader's SVT-term in government. So, Madam Speaker, that is the same figure they had and the same figure now.

The Honourable Minister for Economy is always boasting about an operating surplus which other previous governments have had but this FijiFirst Government surplus is a far smaller one. People, Madam Speaker, are not easily fooled, for they already realise that some things are not quite tying up with government propaganda.

The people's experience with the high cost of living, price increases each time they go to the supermarket, that is what the Honourable Attorney-General is saying cannot be right. Higher debt levels (\$6 billion), increased net deficit as a percent of GDP, 2.5 percent in 2015 rising to 3.5 percent in 2018, people may not know these figures from the Budget Estimates of 2018-2019, but they sure can feel it in their pockets, Madam Speaker.

The *Tebbutt Times* poll results in the past few months indicate that the ordinary citizens are concerned about the high cost of living, rising unemployment, minimum wages and poverty levels. According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the country's total imports recorded in October 2017 which was just nine months ago, reached the highest level of \$465.4 million, whereas the total export value was only \$210.4 million, Madam Speaker.

The trade deficit of \$255 million means foreign exchange levels are affected and affected us all, and we are facing this with the added costs of goods and services costing more and more. So, Madam Speaker, it is no wonder people are complaining about the high cost of living as imports of fuel, telecommunications equipment, recreational vehicles, food stuff like rice, cane sugar, wheat, pharmaceutical products, meat and natural gas drive up the price of commodities.

Up to ten years ago, Madam Speaker, the only sugar we saw in the shops was Fiji sugar as Fiji was exporting quality raw sugar. Who would have thought, Madam Speaker, we would so soon be importing it as local sugar cane production has been trending downwards since 2007 when the Honourable Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama took over the running of government.

We have to tell the Fijian families the truth that the FijiFirst Government is killing off the sugar industry and started it off when they caused the European Union in 2007 to withdraw their €300 million bilateral support for the sugar industry, following the 2006 military *coup*.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON RO. T.V. KEPA.- On rising unemployment, and this is from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, unemployment figures increased to 6.3 percent in 2017 from 6.24 percent in 2016. No wonder then that so many of our young people want to go overseas to work, especially in countries like Australia, where the economy is better and unemployment is lower at 5.4 percent in May of 2018.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- With the unemployment figures trending upwards, one wonders why the Honourable Minister for Economy has not invested a higher percentage of the Budget in the economic sector as they are employment-creating and generating ministries. These Ministries, Madam Speaker, are Agriculture, Fisheries, Forests, Land and Mineral Resources, Industry and Trade and Tourism, Sugar Industry, Public Enterprise and Local Government.

However, Madam Speaker, for these Ministries, the Honourable Minister of Economy has a large control over their Budget, and this has been alluded to earlier by our speakers from this side of the House, as much of it is under RIE in which the Honourable Attorney-General has the final say. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture, 54 percent is under RIE. So, how the agriculture revolution is going to happen at this late stage is anyone's guess. The Ministry of Sugar, Madam Speaker, with the killing of the sugar industry continues with the Ministry of Sugar having 95 percent under RIE, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Local Government, 0.77 percent under RIE, so there goes your municipal elections, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, we are here to tell Fijian families the truth, that although the Budget has been announced and no doubt will be passed, with 46 percent of the total Budget under RIE, under the control of the Honourable Minister for Economy, nothing much is going to change.

The minimum wage of \$2.68, Madam Speaker, is well below the poverty line, whilst \$4 per hour is considered by Fr. Kevin Barr as a living wage, being mindful that the Household Expenditure and Income Survey states that in 2013-2014, poverty was highest with rural families at 36.3 percent, most of them having women as head of the household. No wonder rural people have been flocking to the urban areas and this is all the more reason that better infrastructure and development projects be directed to the rural and maritime areas, and that is what SODELPA will do, Madam Speaker.

And, when we talk about rural areas, we are talking rural, remote and maritime, where there are various types of poverty. Areas like the provinces of Kubuna, which are Tailevu, Lomaiviti, Ra, Naitasiri and parts of Ba; Burebasaga, Madam Speaker, Rewa, Kadavu, Nadroga and Navosa, Serua, Namosi and parts of Ba; and the Tovata confederacy in Cakaudrove, Bua, Macuata, and Lau and of course Rotuma. Indeed, we also consider the peri-urban areas and other settlements. So there are lot of areas that need to be considered in the types of poverty alleviation and interventions that are required and this will be inclusive of everyone, Madam Speaker, and no one will be left behind.

Madam Speaker, how can we continue to fool ourselves that \$2.68 is a fair and equitable wage while paying the Honourable Prime Minister \$328,750 per annum and \$3,000 per day whilst overseas, including other allowances and benefits that accrue to him? Madam Speaker, this does not even include his COP23 allowances as President. The Honourable Ministers are not far behind, with \$200,000 per annum. In this regard, Madam Speaker, the poor remain poor whilst the rich get richer.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Regardless, the people will tell us at the next General Elections, whether this minimum wage is acceptable to them or not.

With all Government budgets, education has always been a priority. In this instance, \$1 billion has been allocated to this sector. Our education, however, Madam Speaker, has taken a beating in the past 12 years with none of the Education Ministers seeming to take into consideration the seriousness and gravity of the situation in regard to teachers and their contracts, their terms and conditions, where some of them are required to work long hours, Madam Speaker, work Saturdays, and provide holiday classes. No wonder there is high absenteeism with exam teachers overworked and overstressed. Right now, there are so many movements in the schools, they transfer teachers in the middle of the term, in the middle of the school year, especially technical teachers and no replacement or late replacement.

This is very disruptive, Madam Speaker, and destructive in the school environment. Why does the Ministry not wait until the end of the school year, particularly with a new teacher in an exam class in the middle of the term? We know what that is like, Madam Speaker, especially when exam results are so important in the life of a student. So I implore the Honourable Minister for Education to take that into consideration in regards to what the teachers are saying.

Reforms from 2007 onwards, Madam Speaker, are being implemented on an *ad hoc* basis, with a total lack of direction or destination. Like a yoyo, Madam Speaker, exams one year, abolish it the next year, whilst introducing classroom based assessment in the following year and then bringing back exams. Teachers are just as confused as the students. Can you imagine the parents, where they are in all this, Madam Speaker? Therefore, what is needed is what has been alluded to earlier is an Education Commission, the last one being in 1999, to examine all aspects of the educational sector in Fiji, to evolve a general pattern of education, and to advise guidelines and policies for the development of education in Fiji.

Then and only then, Madam Speaker, will Fiji be able to regain its reputation as being amongst the best in the Pacific, particularly with literacy and numeracy. We hear horror stories of how children even in Year Six are illiterate because of the social promotion pushing children upwards to make room for the younger ones coming up the system.

The Honourable Minister also needs to understand that education is tuition free, but schooling is not. The Honourable Prime Minister too should also come to terms with this that there is no free education. Fijian families will tell us the truth that education is certainly not free, that the school costs facing our families are considerable.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I have figures from a lower-middle class family indicating they spend over \$60 a week to cover the costs of their two children in primary school. In a school year, that is more than \$2,500. This is on top of start-of-year costs, Madam Speaker, so it is a struggle for the couple and a struggle for many families in Fiji.

What with school uniforms, sandals, schools bags, pencil cases, lunch boxes, et cetera, Madam Speaker? The expenses for all these, Madam Speaker, are added to the other items. The Honourable Minister and the Honourable Prime Minister should have a much better idea of cost challenges facing Fijian families. He should stop telling the nation that parents should not worry about money for school. Figures do not lie, Madam Speaker, and that is why we are telling Fijian families and the Honourable Minister the truth that education is not free.

I know some Fijian families and teachers are very concerned about the Honourable Minister's implementation of this policy 'that no child should be left behind'. My information is that some slow learners have to move automatically into the next class, even when they are not ready. They are not

allowed to repeat. This means that in some cases, children are forced to go forward when they cannot read or write properly, or have not mastered the skills set for that class. They find it hard to put sentences together in English, which is the medium of instruction.

Slow learners are not necessary unsuccessful or stupid students, Madam Speaker. It just takes them a little longer to come to grips with certain subjects. With the present system, they do not get the full opportunity to catch up. That means they are penalised and may indeed remain behind and eventually drop out altogether.

Fijian families, Madam Speaker, want this country to be stable and peaceful. We want to live in a true democracy. In a broader context, we can never claim to be in a normal democracy with common and equal citizenry when the imposed Constitution grants a privileged elite, immunity from their serious crimes. It would be remiss of me, Madam Speaker, ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- ... to not address and speak up for those who have no voice. People like George Speight, Timoci Silatolu, Shane Stevens and others, who have been dealing with the consequences of their actions in facing the harshest penalties this country has ever known, even for what many would regard as offences less serious than those committed by the 2006 *coup* perpetrators.

Murderers and thugs remain at large, Madam Speaker. We do not have a totally free press and members of Fijian families are often afraid to speak out publicly. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I plead with the Honourable Attorney-General to lend an ear to people like George Speight and Timoci Silatolu, to give them a hearing through the Mercy Commission and/or the Parole Board that also have a budgetary allocation. The voiceless ones, where do the incarcerated go to, to have their voices heard, Madam Speaker, or are they to remain voiceless and faceless into the future like George Speight and others, who have been in prison since the year 2000?

Madam Speaker, for the 3,600 plus pensioners, the voiceless and faceless ones who pleaded for justice to the Honourable Prime Minister in 2012 when FNPF when through restructure with so many of them losing their homes and their livelihood.

Many of them have had to relocate to another part of the country to try to make a life for themselves as best they could with a much reduced income, with no other means of survival and with the FNPF Decree closing off whatever means of legal redress they might wish to pursue. For them, the future looks worse than bleak. We have to look after these pensioners, Madam Speaker, who have contributed to the progress and prosperity of our country.

Madam Speaker, on women, I congratulate women for being the pillars supporting the family. We all know when a women is there or not. We can all feel it. Women are created by God to make a difference. In that regard, we ask all women one thing more, and I know you agree to that Honourable Prime Minister. In that regard, we ask of all women one thing more, we have to start at home (*tekivu mai Jerusalemi*), with high incidents of sexual abuse. We ask all women to be more vigilant, more watchful, more attentive, put strategies and interventions in place in the home to protect our most vulnerable and precious in society, that is our children, both girls and boys in our homes where most of the abuse takes place.

Madam Speaker, I also congratulate the women in this House; the Honourable Speaker, Secretary-General to Parliament and her Deputy, it is so good to see you here every day that Parliament has been sitting for the past four years. You are indeed the role models for our younger generations who might want to follow in your footsteps. To the women Parliamentarians, I wish you

all the best and should you be standing in the Elections, I hope you will be back here as we really need good women in the House to raise issues important to the welfare and wellbeing of our country.

Lastly, in closing, I wish to thank the Parliamentarians on both sides of the House for being fellow travellers on this four year journey which sometimes has not been quite plain sailing. I wish to thank most sincerely all who helped get me into Parliament: the SODELPA Party, the staff in the Opposition Parliamentary Office; those who voted for me and those who helped me in some way on my life's journey; to the people of Rewa and Burebasaga and the people of Fiji here and overseas, *vinaka vakalevu*. My prayers are that God continues to bless you, bless the Honourable Prime Minister, and we ask God to bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to have the floor.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney General and the Minister for Economy, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, the Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members: Madam Speaker, allow me to begin this reply to the Budget Estimates debate for 2018-2019 with this personal remark because of my conviction to share my faith in God to all of us here in this august House as we come towards the end of our term, that in the absence to acknowledge and to honour God in the Constitution is a gross mistake indeed and sad because I believe this will have a bearing on how the Government conducts its affairs and business, including the Budget Estimates that is before us.

The Constitution is completely ignored by omitting any reference to God Almighty, even though we try to make some consolation in our national anthem, 'Blessing grant o God of nations ... onwards march together, God bless Fiji'.

Fiji is a secular state. A nation without God, a nation that has elevated mankind as a small God that rejects to embrace the spirituality and wisdom of God to uphold God's moral standards and dignity as a foundation and cornerstone to live with each other with love and respect irrespective of gender, colour or creed, ethnicity, young or old to respect and love each other with compassion, fully understanding that no one is perfect and we fall short of his glory for God is perfect in love.

Madam Speaker, regrettably our nation, is likened to a lost soul, a secular belief that God has no business to interfere with the State affairs. It promotes man as God, a nation that has no spirituality or moral compass as a guide. God's standards rejected, preferring the standard of the world and its interpretation of life which continues to shift, evolving according to popular ideas.

Therefore, any development by Government for the benefit of its people should be guided by moral values for it to be of meaning and satisfaction. A nation that does not trust God is warned by Prophet Jeremiah, and I quote:

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited."

Madam Speaker, our nation misses out on God's blessing because the nation rejects him outright. In contrast, as Prophet Jeremiah prophesied, and I quote:

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is in the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not

fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.”

Madam Speaker, there you have it. Climate Change mitigation of the soul and nation in God’s way.

Madam Speaker, this is what this Budget is all about. It is a deceptive budget, it is designed to hoodwink the people, full of false promises, knowingly that it cannot be fulfilled.

Madam Speaker, this is an election budget in the hope to retain the voters to vote for FijiFirst again. The people are no longer fooled. Any amount of propaganda whether it be Qorvis, *FBC Radio*, *FBC TV* or *Fiji Sun* newspaper, no one believes them anymore.

Unemployment continues to be a national issue as 14,000 school leavers add to the numbers of existing unemployed youths. High cost of living and lack of opportunities, discontinuity in empowerment, ad hoc short-term skill training and many such programmes leave participants with false hopelessness. There is no continuity to progress to tangible outputs so that it is translated to income generation. These poor victims are better off without the programmes because of false hopes and sense of being cheated.

Social health plagues, such as NCDs, high blood pressure, cancer and diabetes have been highlighted in daily newspapers, that have affected even our young teens. These are sad state of the health of our people. Budget allocations should address and improve our livelihood and health.

Madam Speaker, people, families, women, young and old being raped or molested continue to be reported. Babies have been molested or raped by close family members, a society that is sick, a society that has deteriorated in its moral conscience and standard, that is encouraged by prevailing policies of this Government, that does not recognise the importance and value of mankind as God’s creation. People must be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

In terms of employment, civil servants, teachers, nurses are not given due respect and recognition as professionals in their own right. They have no job security because they are given short-term contracts. These are sad realities.

Madam Speaker, to generally address the Budget that is before us for debate, from the outset, this Budget is an election budget, a last attempt to stay in power by trying to sell to the people - the families, men and women of this nation, the youth and children; a very deceptive Budget, a Budget that is not well thought out, theoretical in nature, unrealistic and aimed to fool us by promises after promises that are always unfulfilled.

Madam Speaker, the urban drift stands at 57 percent of the population and will be 60 percent by 2020, a national concern as consecutive budget allocations and implementations have failed to address.

Madam Speaker, informal settlements and squatter problems have not been resolved and false promises in budgetary allocations in previous years are again features of this Budget.

Madam Speaker, our people and families need a government that cares and listens, ready to effectively empower the people by telling the truth and SODELPA offers that.

Madam Speaker, it should be brought to everyone’s notice that the level of debt continues to increase to unprecedented level, so that for every child born today, a \$6,500 debt hangs on the child’s head and will continue to increase year by year, as long as this Government is in power. Each family

and citizen need to be set free, as the shackles of false and unfulfilled promises and propaganda are revealed.

Madam Speaker, this is what this Budget is all about and the truth must be revealed. The revenue forecast is at \$4,236,390.3 or 80.5 percent of the total estimated revenue are from direct and indirect taxes.

Madam Speaker, I must also mention here that this includes sales proceeds from the disposal of Government assets of \$390,400,000.

Madam Speaker, a quick glance through the budgetary allocations of the Heads, SEGs allocation of same amounts are carried over every year which indicate that those allocations were never utilised, even though the allocation was there.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, as I have alluded to above, allocations for projects can always be denied of funds being diverted, denying the fulfilment of much needed developments, especially in rural areas.

Madam Speaker, our people need to understand that nothing is free. This Government has continued to influence and brainwashed the public through media propaganda by erecting billboards all over Fiji in trying to deny the truth.

On the contrary, majority ordinary families and citizens of this country find life very hard and they know the lies. They experience hardships every day and statistics revealed that over 28 percent of our population live below poverty line, another 21 percent live marginally, struggling to make ends meet while job opportunities for our youth and generations that fall into the workforce find no employment, nor are there employment opportunities for graduates and 45 people.

The deception of this Government is to propagate the myth that our people do not have the right professional skillsets, nor qualification, thus recruiting expatriates to take up executive appointments and recruitment, displacing our talented qualified people such as Permanent Secretaries and other professional people for the benefit of regional countries and international organisations to where they have found contracts of employment.

Madam Speaker, the people and families know that their employment in Government is insecure. The future of their family continues to worry them. The financial institutions regard civil servants as risk investment and for a young family to invest in buying house or build a house of their own becomes a dream, in spite of the housing initiative offered in this deceptive Budget.

Madam Speaker, this side of the House will continue to reiterate that this Budget is deceptive and it is our responsibility to all the families in Fiji by revealing the truth about the deception of this Budget. Knowledge is empowerment through true information that the people should know and understand. Deception is not morally right and it is corrupt.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to bring to your attention the issue of allocations under RIE, Requisition to Incur Expenses. The allocations in SEGs under 'R' are parked under the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Madam Speaker, this is a big issue that the people of this nation are not aware and must understand that this Government manages the Budget Estimates and allocation under 'R'.

Allocation under 'R' or 'RIE' or Requisition or whatever covers all Heads from Head 2 to Head 50. Out of the total estimated Budget of \$2,150,481,964 or 46.24 percent comes under 'R'. This is a huge allocation and can affect implementation in the Ministries. Again, Madam Speaker, why is 46.24 percent controlled by one Honourable Minister? Why?

Are the other relevant Ministers not competent to manage their ministerial budgetary allocation? That is the question. Is there no trust? Why are they denied their responsibilities to manage their own allocation because they are accountable for their allocation?

Madam Speaker, those are questions that people ask. They need to know because it affects them and their planning programmes. They need to know the truth.

It is a little wonder, Madam Speaker, that this Government had not performed as is expected of them in spite of the huge budget. Delay in implementation of programmes to the nation and to the people who are important because this budget is for the people.

Again, we see the deception, Madam Speaker. As an example under Head 30 which is under the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, programmes under 'R', a total \$51,991,560 or 54 percent of budget allocation is allocated for this Ministry. These are allocations for projects and programmes for the Ministry of Agriculture but controlled by the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Another example, Madam Speaker, in the extension programme, we have Rice Revitalisation, Ginger Development, Vanilla, *yaqona*, *dalo*, Flat Land Development and Farm Access Roads. In Naisogo, they are saying now that they need road access because they are farmers. So that is the situation, Madam Speaker. In Extension programmes, time is important to plant, harvest and to maximise production, but these are all under 'R'.

A case brought to my attention was in regards to the land clearing and preparation programme last year where this farmer paid his contribution in October, it took six months, Madam Speaker, for the machine to arrive for land clearing and preparation programme. Farming plans, productivity, harvesting, marketing plans all gone because it takes months for the crops to mature, sold and money is earned.

Madam Speaker, poverty and hardship is an indication of a failure of government policies; a government that is desperate to give hand-outs and freebies. A Government that has run out of tangible policies, let alone in the implementation. Handouts is not a solution, it is a form of degradation of human dignity. People should be empowered, our women should be empowered, our youth should be empowered, our men should be empowered, and our children should be empowered. Sustainable empowerment in income generation, Madam Speaker, employment opportunities, free scholarships and to have freedom and not to live in fear of intimidation.

Madam Speaker, the failure of Government is reflected by its policies and implementation and the budget is the vehicle in achieving targets. The people should not be fooled by an inflated budget, full of false promises. Delivery and implementation of development programmes as reflected in the budget for the financial year is a promise and commitment. As we have seen in the last three years, promises are not fulfilled even though the allocations were there.

Head 30 - Ministry of Agriculture again has been struggling to arrest the downslide of the current 6 percent in their contribution to GDP and trying to raise to 15 percent for the last years. The GDP, for the record was high at 16 percent in 1997 and 14 percent in 2001. The agriculture sector's contribution to GDP has been at a low of about 6 percent, and that is the reality.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I would like to remind us of this unprecedented Budget; the unprecedented expenses and revenue that every citizen will have to pay for the debt. Export from the resources should contribute to the GDP, agriculture is only 6 percent, and fisheries has flattened out in its productivity. There needs to be new programmes to be able to reflect an upward trend in the graph.

Timber as alluded to by Honourable Dulakiverata has declined in the years and socio-economic issues continue to be the issue with the people. Non-Communicable Diseases, unemployment, investment climate, crimes, high cost of living, squatters, urban drift, housing and security of employment are some of the benchmarks or indicators that the Government should base its performance as we address the Budget this year, otherwise this Government is only full of false promises.

With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence for this presentation. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Fisheries.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Fisheries budget for 2018-2019 is set at \$20.5 million. This comprises of \$11.3 for Operating Expenditure, \$8.2 for Capital and \$1 million is attributed to VAT. This is an increase of \$1.7 million from the 2017-2018 Budget.

Madam Speaker, the focus of the Ministry's Budget this year is to support operations and initiatives within the area of Aquaculture, Fisheries Research and Development and Improved Fisheries in rural and maritime development through enhanced Ice Plant Production and Refrigeration.

Madam Speaker, in terms of new initiatives under aquaculture, there is an allocated budget of \$500,000. While there is an existing budget under the Aquaculture Programme, this additional \$500,000 will focus at providing the financial support to assist in the development of a more commercially driven aquaculture sector.

Madam Speaker, the main focus is to achieve a more driven sector in the production of brackish water shrimps and freshwater prawns. While this financial budget focusses on developing a more commercially driven farm, the initiative will help farmers in areas of shrimp production, farm maintenance and enhancement with additional research done for appropriate feed.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, Fiji currently imports most of its shrimps and prawns to meet the demand for our local markets in areas of tourism and local consumption. The additional \$500,000 in the aquaculture budget, provides the basis in achieving an import substitution and supports the ongoing initiatives within the aquaculture programme.

Madam Speaker, while these funds seek to address the need to commercialisation of production, it is important to understand that to achieve a commercialised aquaculture sector, there needs to be an improvement in the current aquaculture infrastructure. That is why, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries welcomes the \$350,000 budget allocated for the upgrade and rehabilitation of the Naduruloulou, Ba and Dreketi Hatcheries.

Madam Speaker, over the past, it has been evident that without proper infrastructural support, it is difficult to fully operationalise such initiatives. While saying this, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries through its bilateral partners have undertaken multiple scoping exercise to determine the

type of infrastructural upgrade needed within the aforementioned aquaculture stations. This sets us in a suitable position to better maximise the budgetary provisions. Additionally, Madam Speaker, a portion of the funds will be used to conduct aquaculture training programme for farmers that includes financial capacity in accounting and book keeping.

Through the formation of farming associations, the Ministry of Fisheries will raise awareness for farmers with the concept of introducing them to new farming methods aimed at a more commercial approach. Over the past few months, the Ministry of Fisheries had undertaken such programmes and will look to continue to develop this initiative with the allocated budget.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, reflecting on the importance of aquaculture initiatives, the infrastructure development done in Ba, Naduruloulou and Dreketi, the 2018-2019 Budget has the allocation of \$380,000 for infrastructure development for the Galoa Research Station. Madam Speaker, the budgetary allocation will provide the much needed infrastructural development within the hatchery. With these developments, Madam Speaker, there will be a constant supply of post larvae to existing and new farmers allowing maximum benefit in shrimp production.

Madam Speaker, I cannot stress enough the importance of aquaculture in food security and import substitution. Aquaculture products provides the perfect buffer in ensuring sustainability, as it contributes to the reduction of wild caught species.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, there is a further \$783,769 allocated for the Caboni Multi-Species Hatchery in Ra. While located strategically within the Western Division to assist in fingerling distribution, the Caboni Hatchery is earmarked to be the first hatchery to focus on finfish farming.

While the Ministry of Fisheries have secured technical experts in the development of the farm, the species that will be farmed under the finfish initiative includes milk fish, species of cord and coral trout and other fin species that have been identified to be threatened. The Ministry of Fisheries looks forward to progressing this ground breaking project as it contributes to sustainability through food security.

Madam Speaker, the Fisheries' budget allocation is strategically spread. In saying that I would like to highlight the budgetary provision for initiatives and programmes within our rural, coastal and maritime communities.

First, Madam Speaker, when considering coastal and maritime communities, it is important to identify the type of support that is needed to boost economic growth through improved livelihood. While reflecting on that, Madam Speaker, one of the services provided to these distant yet important communities is establishment of ice plants. For these rural maritime communities, the availability of ice and fish storage facilities is important. It provides a longer shelf life for marine commodities and contributes to proper fish handling, which allows for better commercial value on fish stocks.

Madam Speaker, in total, the 2018-2019 Budget allocation sees a:

- \$450,000 for upgrade work on the Ice Plant in Ba;
- \$1.8 million for the construction of the Ice Plant Office and Quarters at Wainigadru, Moala and Cicia; and a further
- \$279,000 for Lekutu Fisheries Station which will cater for the completion and upgrade of the cold storage and fishing area operation facility.

Madam Speaker, while those projects may seem to be basic infrastructural development, it is important to note the fact that the completion of these projects collectively would contribute to broader economic development within the rural and maritime areas.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, while noting that not all the rural and maritime areas are suitable locations to establish ice plants due to the lack of essential components of water source, the Ministry of Fisheries under the current budget have allocated funds to develop seaweed production as an alternative.

While there are existing farms within the broader rural and maritime areas, the current Budget has allocated \$259,000 to the seaweed development programme. This will allow Fijians within the maritime areas to be economically efficient as it provides a sustainable income generating venture for rural, coastal and maritime communities.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, to ensure that the seaweed project breaks into the niche market available for seaweed products, the Ministry of Fisheries have over the past engaged partners in conducting additional training for seaweed value adding and production. This activity will continue and will be strengthened in the new allocated budget.

Madam Speaker, like any other programme, I cannot stress enough the importance of research and development. The current threats of depleting stocks and climate change signifies the importance of research to understand the status of our resources, to enable us in identifying mitigating factors. While perceiving these important activities, the 2018-2019 Budget has allocated \$300,000 for the Makogai Mariculture Development Centre.

Madam Speaker, in my earlier statement, I had briefed the House on the fin fish initiative that will be undertaken in Caboni, Ra. That work will also be undertaken in Makogai Mariculture Centre and will focus on complementing the fin fish farming programme. The allocated funds will be used to purchase spawning and reseeded equipment while ensuring that the Makogai facility is developed to its full capacity.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, under the Research and Development Programme, the existing Pearl Industry will continue to grow. This is enabled through continuous feasibility studies of potential spat collection sites and viability of community based farms.

The Government through the Ministry of Fisheries will continue to target this important yet sustainable industry to grow to its full potential. Under the 2018-2019 Budget, Madam Speaker, \$295,200 is allocated to further develop the Pearl Industry. While these funds will be used to procure spat collection materials, it will also focus on conducting training on spat collection, harvesting and business models since this industry has shown evidence that it can now run on its own.

Madam Speaker, we will also finalise the Pearl Management Plan to ensure that the work is undertaken in the development of this dedicated database. This will all contribute to a more collective approach within Fisheries Management. Madam Speaker, over the past year, there has been substantial work in ensuring the sustainability of our coastal resources.

Members of the House will note that the Ministry of Fisheries had begun with seasonal closures and total ban on threatened species such as *beche-de-mer* and more recently the seasonal ban on coral trout and cords or as we know it, *Kawakawa* and *Donu*.

Madam Speaker, while this is not an easy undertaking, the 2018-2019 Budget has allocated \$300,000 to support Marine Inventory Survey. This important piece of work will focus on stock

survey for customary fishing areas. This is vital as it provides essential science data to complement and support the development of management plans and set the platforms to ensure sustainable fishing practices within our coastal areas.

Madam Speaker, allow me to briefly touch on the budget allocated to coastal fisheries development. This is an important activity that has allocated \$772,380. This budgetary provision is essential as it will allow the Ministry of Fisheries to continue to provide advisory services to fishermen. Additionally, the allocated budget will also assist in the implementation of training needs to improve fish handling, quality control and marketing initiatives. This in turn will address the development of a more viable fishing sector.

Madam Speaker, this budget also has a wider coverage as it provides financial support for the work undertaken and the deployment of Fishing Aggregated Devices (FADs), engine and boat repairs along with inshore data collation for science and management purposes.

In terms of the importance of surveillance and enforcement, a priority of the Ministry is to strengthen monitoring surveillance and enforcement within the coastal zones. There are ongoing studies being conducted with the assistance of the New Zealand Government to assess the gaps within the system.

This will permit the sector in determining the most effective and feasible option to reduce and eliminate illegal and unsustainable fishing. Madam Speaker, the budget allocation for this Activity is \$225,000 and this will be used in the procurement of aluminium boats to support surface patrols.

Madam Speaker, in concluding, there is work to be done on the upgrade of institutional office in those affected by recent cyclones.

The 2018-2019 Budget has allocated \$400,000 to upgrade works at Naduruloulou, Sigatoka, Lami and Wainibokasi.

An additional \$315,000 will assist in rehabilitation works on infrastructure damaged during *Tropical Cyclones Winston, Geeta, Keni and Josie*. The rehabilitation will focus on a much higher standard that can withstand disasters of that magnitude.

Madam Speaker, just before I conclude, I would like to just comment on some of the discussions that had been brought up by the Opposition today. I think the Opposition by listening to them, they seem to have moved their campaign mode from the public and into Parliament and this really has diverted the attention of the actual participation in the debate of the Budget by making negative comments than to a budget that they should have accepted and make recommendations for improvement, instead of politicking and campaigning inside the House, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

I must remind, Madam Speaker, the Opposition party that in the *Bible* it says that the word of God is like a double-edged sword. It cuts forward but it is sharper when it comes back.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the Opposition seems to have confusion on the Budget even though they have been given a wide discussions and briefing by the Ministry of Economy. They seem to think that they do not understand it at all, no.

(Honourable Members interject)

I would like to say this, Madam Speaker, because in this House, it is a Chamber of discussions where we make comments and make recommendations or alternatives. That is basically the true and essential responsibility of a responsible Opposition.

(Acclamations)

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the allocated budget for 2018-2019 for the Ministry of Fisheries is one that is well-spread. It will allow us to focus on the economic viability and sustainability of Fiji's fisheries sector through a more collective and holistic approach. The Ministry of Fisheries will continue to use the allocated budget to achieve its short, medium and long-term goals for the betterment of the Fijian people.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I commend and support the 2018-2019 National Budget. I thank you. *Vinaka Vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, I am allowing the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver his speech tomorrow when he resumes.

I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to have the floor.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House: A very good afternoon to you, *Namaste, As-Salaam-Alaikum* and *Ni Sa Bula.*

At the outset, Madam Speaker, I must applaud the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for the formulation of a very well-thought of and a very well-considered 2018-2019 National Budget.

Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that some have called it a "brave budget", some have called it a "family budget", some have said it is an "excellent and consistent, bold budget" and some have said it is a "healthy budget", "credible budget" and a "responsible budget".

Our people have spoken, nothing but the truth, I agree with them all. It was also interesting to note Madam Speaker, the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Kepa as per her quote in the *Fiji Sun*, I quote:

"There are new initiatives put in place for Fijians to benefit from, which is great," Ro Teimumu Kepa.

It is simply pleasing, Madam Speaker, and so welcoming to note that the majority of our Fijians have embraced the 2018-2019 Budget.

From a new born to a senior citizen, from a student to a farmer, civil servants to business communities, no one is left behind.

Madam Speaker, our Honourable Prime Minister, leader and mentor has always advocated for an inclusive Government, an educated Fiji, a healthy Fiji, an empowered Fiji, united Fiji, building

a stronger and a better Fiji, a new Fiji and, Madam Speaker, this Budget reflects and confirms the commitment by our FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, I sincerely wish to thank and congratulate our Honourable Prime Minister for leading a Government that is passionate and considerate about its people before and above all else; and my contribution towards the allocations to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation will substantiate just that.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, is a budget that is going to positively impact lives of all Fijians, especially those in the middle to lower income families and I stand before this august House today to register my full support.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also thank my Honourable Minister Vuniwaqa for her tireless efforts in taking the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to new heights. She had been an instrumental leader, interacting with world leaders and international organisations at the global platforms to supporting grassroots Fijians at the community levels. Watching Honourable Vuniwaqa's passion for improving the status of living for disadvantaged Fijians is a marvel, and I wish to reinforce in this august House that it takes a woman to drive this kind of compassionate change for any nation.

Madam Speaker, the completion of this fiscal year also marks the near completion of my role as Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, and I cannot express enough eye openers in these two years, Madam Speaker.

During the years, I have certainly understood in depth the real life challenges of our disadvantaged populations. The Ministry, being the custodians of the welfare of people living in poverty, elderly people living with disabilities, women and children, have a very important responsibility. The responsibility to make life easier for the most vulnerable groups of people in our beloved nation.

Madam Speaker, it gives great satisfaction to be of service to our people. I witnessed tears of joy, happiness and smiles in the faces of people who are assisted through our Ministry.

Madam Speaker, very recently when I delivered a wheelchair to one of our welfare recipients, I was deeply touched by her gesture of appreciation. She kept kissing my hands and blessed our Government, our Prime Minister, our Ministry for the "care" and compassion towards the less fortunate.

Madam Speaker, this was just one incident out of many; and it goes without saying how much the assistance provided by our Government through various schemes and programmes are valued and appreciated by the disadvantaged. I wonder how these assessments will be classified by the Opposition camp?

Madam Speaker, the allocation of \$133 million towards our Ministry for the fiscal year 2018-2019 sets the path that we as a Ministry can work on to improve our services and strengthen our partnership to give the best possible programmes we can to our people.

Madam Speaker, poor people in poor areas want the same things that any other Fijian does. They want to have a decent livelihood to meet their basic needs, to lead a fulfilled life, take good care of the children and have a role in their community and in the society. In poor families, very little of this is possible without a growing economy. The Fijian Government's record growth in an

annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economic growth over the last nine years is the first step in this direction.

The second step is education and this is the first Fijian Government that has been able to make the Education Ministry a billion dollar Ministry which with this achievement will also fulfil the dream of our Ministry, to ensure that every Fijian child has an adequate education regardless of their parent's financial circumstances. This Government has lifted the financial burden off the shoulders of poor parents and every single one of us ought to be proud of this achievement.

Madam Speaker, lately during the Sanatan Convention, I have met many people, who genuinely appreciated the Budget and blessed our Prime Minister and our FijiFirst Government for making education possible for their children and to top up their happiness, TELS loan repayment and other incentives even in this budget.

There were happier students, senior citizens and young couples planning babies, they were simply enthralled at the idea that their newborns will have financial security. The thousand dollars will help parents take better care of their newborn and the child will already have a bank balance of at least five hundred dollars when he or she goes to school. These also are great incentives to save and secure a child's safe and secure future, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice, it is not a handout; it is not a freebee; it is not a bribe; it is not vote-buying as claimed by the Opposition. It is the protection of the fundamental human right; ...

(Acclamations)

... the right to dignity and a decent life. If this pains the Opposition, then I am sorry to say, these are not leaders for the people.

(Acclamations)

They are insulting the recipients who take advantage of the various grants and assistance provided by the Government. They are insulting people who took advantage of the Farms-CARE, eTransport-CARE, Homes-CARE initiatives, so people are watching and listening.

Madam Speaker, while poverty persists, there is no true freedom which is why the Fijian Government has been taking all possible measures to progress in the area of poverty reduction by supporting families living in destitute through Social Protection Programmes. All our Social Protection Programmes saw an increase in the last fiscal year.

It was necessary, and from my personal interactions with the recipients, it has been extremely helpful to them. It may mean nothing to a person who goes to bed on a full stomach each night and has money in his or her wallet on any given day, but it means a lot to a person who cannot afford to catch a taxi to the hospital when there is an emergency, or has to ask the neighbour for a small loan to put food on the table for their children.

Madam Speaker, we are already in line with the globally required strategies to end poverty in order to improve access to sustainable livelihoods, entrepreneurial opportunities and productive resources. We have in place our Welfare Graduation Programme, for which \$500,000 has been allocated in order to move families who are currently dependent on Social Welfare Assistance, but have the potential to become self-reliant to engage in entrepreneurial activities for income generation. These opportunities are also available for Fijian women, under the approximately \$1.2 million budget

allocation to the Women's Plan of Action, whereby women's groups can request for funding assistance for their income generating projects under the formal sector employment and livelihood programme.

Madam Speaker, for the first time ever and making this 2018-2019 a sure shot inclusive budget is the allocation of \$100,000 towards the economic empowerment of people with disabilities programme, which is specifically for Fijians living with disabilities, to engage in entrepreneurial activities using their skills and business sense to sustain themselves.

Madam Speaker, we respect the fact that disability is not in-ability. Never before has any Fijian Government recognised this to be a possibility and having this programme in place upholds this Government's commitment to equal treatment and equal opportunities to all Fijians ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- ... to further assist the elderly and persons with disabilities, Government will now fully fund bus fares for persons over 60 years of age who are currently under the Bus Fare Scheme Programme and the same will continue for persons living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, in aiming to progressively develop social protection systems to support those who cannot support themselves and to provide universal access to basic social services, Government has allocated Social Protection Allowances for specific vulnerable segments of the Fijian population, including the Social Pension Scheme for the elderly; the Disability Allowance for the disabled; and Care and Protection Allowance for the children.

In order to take the services to the doorsteps of the rural Fijians, we are very happy to receive the \$400,000 allocation towards the REACH Project, which will further improve the pledge to increase accessibility.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, in empowering people living in poverty and people of marginalised circumstances and their organisations, Government has allocated \$300,000 funds to women's organisations: \$200,000 to Homes of Hope; \$150,000 Grants to Girls Homes; \$200,000 Grants to Voluntary Organisations; and an increased budget of \$404,000 towards the National Council for Older Persons; and \$1 million operating grant to the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons to strengthen their administration and operation capacities, to better implement the vision of their organisations that complements the aims of our Government.

All these institutions are helpers of our Ministry in looking after our clientele and we acknowledge the fact that the Ministry cannot work in isolation. We need the cooperation of these non-government organisations, and one important government institution is the Poverty Monitoring Unit that acts as an adviser to Government on the effectiveness of Poverty Alleviation Programmes of Government, and has been given nearly \$300,000 to carry out this significant role. Additionally, \$580,970 has been allocated to secure land for the construction of a Western Disabilities Centre that will serve the needs of persons living with disabilities in the Western Division by providing specialised services and support.

Madam Speaker, in addressing that this proportionate impact of poverty on women, we continue to create an equitable environment for Fijian women, especially in terms of economic participation with the allocation of the \$500,000 budget for the National Women's Expo. We aim to take the event, connecting Fijian women artisans to markets to greater heights with the allocation towards the National Women Machinery, we should also be able to support more women walk out of poverty, access more services, access capacity building programmes and restart their lives on their

own in case they have to come out of abusive relationships. The cases of violence against women in Fiji sit at staggering and shameful numbers, Madam Speaker, and most women decide to remain in abusive relationships and suffer domestic violence because of not having any financial means of survival should they live by themselves.

I thank the Honourable Minister Mereseini Vuniwaqa for lobbying for an allocation that will meet this need of survivors of domestic abuse and violence for which we have been given \$100,000 under the Domestic Violence Support Programme.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude, I kept on hearing Honourable Gavoka stood up and talked about 'R'; why the money is in 'R'?; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; why the money is in 'R'?; and the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki, why the money is in 'R'? What is the problem if the money is in 'R'?

(Laughter)

Regardless of where the money is kept, if it is needed, it will be released, as simple as that. I mean, I hope there are no more 'Rs' coming from that side.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the 2018-2019 Budget is an inclusive one that caters for the needs of people living in poverty, the elderly, people living with disabilities, women and children adequately.

Our Ministry has also been able to assist disaster victims in partnership with the Ministry of Economy for the Fijians affected by cyclones and floods over the past two years, where the Ministry's staff have served clients in affected areas, sometimes working until the next day, and that too with joy.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Pramod Chand said, "Oh, why do the government have to go to the ground, let the civil servants work? *Areh*, it is our ministry!

(Laughter)

If the Honourable Minister is not there, supporting our people on the ground, and if I am not there supporting, then who will?

(Laughter)

The Honourable Parmod Chand sometimes makes the craziest statement – I tell you, which holds no water. I do not know where the statement is going, anyway it was a pleasure serving our people who found care, who we care for. It takes people of courage, Madam Speaker and great passion to do this, and I wish to take this time to thank all staff of the Ministry that complements the objectives of this Government. We look forward to continue to strive to give our people the best possible services to ensure they live a fulfilling life. I thank the Government for the allocations for the new fiscal year and thank you all for your love, support and guidance.

Honourable Attorney-General, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister and all the Honourable Members of both sides of the House, thank you all. God bless Fiji, God bless FijiFirst. *Vinaka Vakalevu.*

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I will now call upon the Honourable Jilila Kumar to take the floor.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Good evening, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, people in the gallery and all Fijians in Fiji and abroad who are watching and listening from the comfort of their homes: First and foremost, I wish to take this opportunity to personally thank the Government and the Ministry of Economy in particular for this responsible and commendable Budget for this fiscal year.

A special gratitude goes to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for their foresight and love for the people of our nation, and these attributes are reflected in the 2018-2019 Budget.

Madam Speaker, from a teacher's perspective, if we want to know the kind of parents and families our students have, we look at their children's behaviour and attributes because they are their parent's mirrors in schools. Likewise in any government, Madam Speaker, if we want to know the kind of leaders that we have, we look at the budget because what concerns them the most and the passion that they have for the nation will be reflected in the budget.

And honestly speaking, Madam Speaker, I am glad to state that the current leadership of the FijiFirst Government's attributes are clearly reflected in the 2018-2019 Budget because this Budget accommodates all Fijians, despite colour, creed, ethnicity, male or female, children or adults, rich or poor, able or disabled, fathers or mothers, and the list goes on. This clearly demonstrates true love and the genuine care by our leaders in providing a worthwhile, responsible and commendable Budget as this.

My topic today, Madam Speaker, is the 'New Horizon', and I will repeat, the New Horizon. As we all understand when we talk about horizons, it is when you look out your window and note the furthest point you can see - the line where the sky meets the earth - and the edge is called the horizon.

Along this horizon, Madam Speaker, they are always special because beautiful lights appear and the beauty of this scenery is when they are seen during sunrise and sunset. So, this beautiful light is likened to this Budget in a way that brings sunshine and special brightness to the faces of our Fijian families.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- As the Honourable Minister of Economy said in his Budget Address on Thursday the 28th June 2018, and I quote:

“What makes this year's Budget special is that it is built for Fijian families.”

He further stated:

“It is a Budget built for every Fijian family everywhere in Fiji because all Fijian families matter. When Fijian families are strong, united, stable and thriving, the nation is strong, the nation is united, the nation succeeds and this is a budget that is grounded in the same values that build strong and stable Fijian families; responsibility, integrity, accountability, foresight and the sense of duty and care for our fellow Fijians.”

I wish to highlight, Madam Speaker, some significant areas and their budget allocations. In the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, for example, is a special Budget of \$300,000 to fund the Community Based Correction Act 2018. This Act was just passed in Parliament this year. This is a system that fosters community-based sentencing options, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. This Act requires the supervision of offenders where they are sentenced to community-based work. The allocation caters for the appointment of staff and volunteer supervisors, training and remuneration of community volunteer supervisors.

On the same note, Madam Speaker, the budget is also allocated for the expenses for juvenile, with the total amount of \$80,000 and \$15,000 will be used to buy a piece of land for a new Juvenile Centre. Currently, there is only one Juvenile Centre in Fiji, which is in Samabula. This Centre accommodates juveniles who are in conflict with the law. This is a very delicate age group in society, who are below 18 years of age. This budget allocation will further enhance the rehabilitation programmes that are currently undertaken by the centre and in the hope that the number of recidivism will drop significantly.

Another significant area, which I wish to highlight, Madam Speaker, is the budget allocation of \$5 million towards Parenthood Assistance Payments in Fiji. That means, mothers from families with the household income below \$30,000, upon the birth of a child, whether it be a first, second or third child and so on, will be granted \$1,000. The moment the baby is registered at the Births, Deaths and Marriages Office and issued a birth certificate, a new bank account will be opened at any participating bank in the mother's name to receive the Parenthood Assistant Payment.

The first \$500 will be available to the mother immediately to purchase the baby's needs and the other \$500 will remain in the child's account until he or she enters Year One in the primary school. No fees will be charged in maintaining these accounts, Madam Speaker, and this is history in the making. This is a very commendable initiative by Government for a child to start off with the financial foundation and hopefully in the long run, parents will also contribute to their children's saving account.

I wish to quote some responses from parents' towards this initiative, Madam Speaker, from the *Fiji Sun*. Serenia Keto, 26, a mother of two of Naibalebale, Viwa, Yasawa, welcomed the initiative. I quote:

“What a joy to receive that news when announced. We thank the Government and they will be blessed,” she said.

“The vision for the future generation will be better in terms of their upbringing, but this does not motivate us to have more babies. We work with God's plan, but generally this is great news.”

Serenia's mum, Semaema Maria, 49, said, and I quote:

“They (the kids born in the New Year) are the lucky babies. They have benefits we did not have during our parenting days.”

Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank the Government for the increased budget allocation for TELS, with an increase in budget allocation of \$46.5 million. This initiative will further enhance and open doors to all Fijian children to be accessed to tertiary education.

Madam Speaker, some parents which I know have two or three children who are in tertiary institutions because of TELS and Toppers. One particular example, is a simple farmer who has a

child, studying a Bachelor of Environmental Science at the University of the South Pacific, and another who is studying a Bachelor Degree in Forestry. He is one of the happiest Fijian fathers and more importantly he said, and I quote:

“Students, no matter what background they come from or their parent’s financial status, the good news is there, a lot of children who are now able to attend tertiary education due to the provision of such grant.

This was impossible during my time and that was the reason I ended up to be a farmer because my parents could not afford to send me to tertiary institution, despite my capability. And now I am so glad two of my children are in tertiary institution and I have another three who will also attend university once they complete their high school education.”

These, Madam Speaker, are clear indications of Government’s commitments and responsibilities towards its people, and the Government must be commended on these initiatives.

Another initiative by Government that needs to be highlighted is the regularisation or the appointment of Special Constables in the 2018-2019 National Budget of \$24.6 million for that purpose. This initiative has been welcomed by the Commissioner of Police, Brigadier Sitiveni Qiliho, who was extremely thrilled and thanked the Government on behalf of the Special Constables, working with the Fiji Police Force for a number of years.

Brigadier Sitiveni Qiliho said, “if there was a word to describe the Police budget, it was “exquisite”. I repeat, “it was exquisite”. He said, “the Police budget showed the Government’s commitment to the internal security of Fiji.”

Madam Speaker, I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government for the initiative in constructing the subdivisional hospital for Nadroga/ Navosa. Madam Speaker, 10,000 Fijians in the Nadroga and Navosa Province will benefit from the \$11 million new subdivisional hospital that will be constructed by end of next year. The new hospital, as the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy said, will provide maternity services, pharmaceutical services and lab testing, along with x-rays and ultra-sound.

Those are, Madam Speaker, some of the Budget highlights as new horizons that the Fijian Government is taking us to as the focus of emphasis is the family. And I reiterate what the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy said, I quote:

“This is a Budget that empowers Fijian families, laying out new and better economic opportunities for every member of every family in the country. This is a Budget that gives a leg-up to families, who need special care, those in rural and remote parts of Fiji and those low-income families. This is a Budget that protects families who are facing tragic and unforeseen circumstances. And this, Madam Speaker, is a Budget that will bring every Fijian family more prosperity, not only in the here and now, but for the years and decades to come.”

As a member of this august House, I therefore, appeal to this august House to join hands together by disseminating this Budget message honestly and truthfully to our people, if we are genuine in taking our nation forward. Gone are the days when we lie to people about the truth, and let us work responsibly as Members of Parliament for the betterment of our people.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I fully support this Budget and may the good Lord bless us and bless our beloved nation. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport to have the floor.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Members, my colleague Ministers: I rise in support of the 2018-2019 National Budget as delivered by the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, very briefly, I would like to respond to the issues raised by Opposition Members during today's debate.

Wainiyabia Jetty, Madam Speaker, the truth is that the landslide investigation has been carried out. That was the first phase of the work, so in other words, the work has started as far as the jetty is concerned. We cannot just go and build the jetty. Listen!

Madam Speaker, the location has been identified as well. Madam Speaker, FRA has confirmed to me that the tender is going out for the ocean studies, geotechnical study and structural design. That is the truth, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, secondly on the Namoli land in Lautoka which was raised by the Honourable Gavoka, I wish to inform the Honourable Member that the land within the city where Namoli is situated is occupied by the villagers themselves and the council is providing them with free garbage collection, provision of street lights and other services. So, I do not know which land he is talking about. Even the town rate they are not paying, they have been exempted.

Thirdly, the Savusavu land which was raised by the Honourable Chand (unfortunately he is not here), the Savusavu Town Council has confirmed that no land which was under Town Council has been sold out to any of the businessman.

Fourthly, Madam Speaker, issues raised by the Honourable Aseri Radrodoro during his presentation on the WAF \$33 million saga, Madam Speaker, the KPMG Audit Report has been handed over to FICAC for investigation.

On other issues that were raised by the Honourable Member, let me inform this august House that most of the issues that were raised in terms of roads, bridges and jetty are all in the programme and I only wish that he would have time to look at the circular or the list that has been issued; the breakdown.

Madam Speaker, he also criticised us on the issuance of taxi permits. He is very much aware of the reforms that is taking place. All taxi permits will now be issued based on the zoning now. But on the issue that he raised that all those who have paid are still waiting, there is no truth in it. The truth is that, all those who have paid before the freeze and during the freeze to LTA with evidence, they all have been issued with taxi permits. That is the truth and the Honourable Attorney-General had given them the taxi permits.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we were in Labasa last week and yes during the freeze, there were certain people who had paid to LTA the fees to LTA when they came to LTA.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- You want some response, let me respond!

(Laughter)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- So with those evidences that were presented to the Committee, the Committee has agreed and said that these people have paid and they should be given the permit, which we have issued.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we were in Labasa last week. There were lots of issues raised about the bus industry, especially the bus services and in all our *talanoa* sessions, this issue has been raised. So what we have asked, we have asked LTA to carry out a survey in terms of the service providers - by the bus companies.

Let me say this, if the report comes as true as what people have been complaining about during our *talanoa* session, I can tell you now, all those routes will go on tender. It will go in the newspaper and we want companies to provide services because this has been raised by the people of Labasa, Madam Speaker, and we have got all the records in regards to this.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, let me go on to the Budget proper response with the theme of, “uplifting families, uplifting Fiji”. I congratulate the Honourable Minister for Economy and his staff for a Budget that promotes economic growth and, Madam Speaker, at the same time, a socially and economical Budget, addressing the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged segments of our communities. It is a family friendly and a friendly focused Budget, in particular for low income earners and our rural Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I also thank the Government for its tireless efforts in the last eight years, resulting in the healthy results in ensuring low inflation rates and in growing exports. All Fijians can be comfortable with the positive economic outlook. This is a clear indication of having the right economic policies under the FijiFirst Government, that all Fijians are benefitting from, including the Opposition Members.

Madam Speaker, before I turn to areas under my portfolio, let me briefly highlight on the historic allocation to honour all the indentured labourers of *Girmityas*. The celebration to mark the 140th year of arrival of these deprived labourers from India to Fiji will allow all Fijians to remember and pay their respect to their remarkable story of hardships and survival. It is part of our shared history that we must never forget.

Madam Speaker, allow me to also commend the initiatives announced in the Budget to provide incentives for the upgrade of buildings. This has long been an issue for Fijian Municipal Councils. The upkeep of properties in our towns and cities are often neglected leading to many buildings being eyesores. While the Councils are tasked with ensuring that properties are presentable, they lack the proper legislation to enforce compliance. I am hopeful, Madam Speaker, that property owners will take advantage of the incentives and ensure that their buildings are clean, structurally sound and presentable.

Madam Speaker, before I turn to some key allocations and its projected benefits to all Fijians, let me respond to some of the comments and in particular ill-founded and baseless criticisms of the Budget. Madam Speaker, some of these critics seemed to have discovered new catch words -

Elections Budget, false hope. It seems some of the Opposition Members bring out these catch words when they are lost for words and have nothing of note to express on the Budget.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Minister of Economy in his delivery of the Budget pointed out, and as his facts and figures and sound fiscal policy points out, it was an infrastructure and economic growth budget. A budget that provides for all Fijians and has all Fijians covered under its provision.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I commend the Budget for taking the brave role of a spending budget when the easier path in an elections year was to tighten spending, to show that we are good economic managers.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- This brave approach is based on the sound reasoning of ensuring continuity of its infrastructure and economic development and growth for all Fijians. ...

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Tightening of the belt is not required when we have unprecedented growth of eight years with sound projections of 7, even more growth into the ninth year. Fijians are enjoying many of the benefits of this targeted infrastructure and economic development approach. This was not always so, Madam Speaker, especially in the 1990s. Madam Speaker, the failure of the 1993 Budget and the repeated failures of the budgets during Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka's leadership left behind only a poor legacy for all Fijians. Madam Speaker, neglect of capital investment in areas such as roads, jetties, airports, water, electricity, telecommunication, housing and environment is the legacy that previous governments left behind since Independence to 2006; that is a fact.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Today, it is easy for those so-called leaders to engage in a scare tactics that the present Government's Budget will be burdened on our children. Madam Speaker, the truth is that the children of the generation under his leadership were the once burdened by under development that was the legacy of the rot in his government. This burden from past decades had been lifted through the current Government (FijiFirst) on the sound fiscal policies.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The 2018-2019 Budget outlines many of these achievements in capital projects and infrastructure. Perhaps the most shining of these examples are the newly transformed Nadi International Airport and the road works and landscape from Naisoso to Martintar.

Madam Speaker, let me go back on the Opposition's catch word, that is, elections budget and all those nonsense.

Madam Speaker, let me state, it is not an elections budget, nor an irresponsible spend of public funds, just as giving people a hand-up after a natural disaster is not an elections freebies. As a responsible Government, post-disaster relief is given in good faith on the principle that those who

had suffered and lost need to be given assistance in getting their lives together again. And let us not forget that these forms of special assistance are all based on aiding those Fijians whose income fall below a particular threshold. This is what they do not understand.

They are saying the rich will get richer, the poor will get poorer, but they do not realise that all the initiatives by this Government has a ceiling, there is a threshold less than \$20,000, \$30,000, who are these people? These are the very poor people of the community which no government even bothered to think about them ...

(Acclamations)

... and I will be covering more on this area. As such it is not a free for all situation but a means desperate and means based system of providing a hand-up for those in need.

Madam Speaker, our recent initiative of Homes-CARE is a hand-up not a hand-out or a freebie or an elections gimmick as stated by SODELPA and NFP. Sometimes I just wonder how you sleep at night after saying all these things, that it is a freebie, hand-up to our people. You know it hurts, honestly.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- They do not care.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Ask those who suffered and lost homes and livelihood and they will acknowledge such relief for what it is and give their appreciation where it is due. For those who are pointing fingers at the post-disaster relief effort, it is timely, Madam Speaker, to remind them that our sustained economic growth of eight years had been through some of the most extreme weather conditions ever faced in Fiji. Relief efforts and recovery from events such as *TC Winston* and recent flooding have been remarkable and on the back of Fiji's strong fiscal position. This is testimony to a strong Fijian economy under the FijiFirst Government like the Fijian people that they represent.

Madam Speaker, as I tend to speak about the Budget and departments under my portfolio, namely in Local Government, Infrastructure and Transport, I would like to highlight some of the key areas rather than a blow-by-blow of the budgetary allocations. I welcome the initiative of Government to move the Rural, Local Authority from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry for Local Government. This will, Madam Speaker, enable centralised inspection and approving process for new developments. This will also bring National Solid Waste Management under the Ministry of Local Government thus aligning our efforts in this critical area as well as approval process for land and building development.

Madam Speaker, among other key investments in municipal markets, the timely completion of this project means that not only consumers but small business operators in the form of market vendors will all benefit from additional and improved market places. In addition, we had embarked on upgrading the markets to make better use of natural lighting and ventilation in response to climate change.

Madam Speaker, sporting and recreational facilities has been another key area of investment by the FijiFirst Government. This has been rolled out across Fijian towns and cities. As is evident in the budget allocation, this is the most comprehensive upgrade of municipal sporting facilities in Fiji's history including sporting parks, construction of swimming pools and children's park for our young ones.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Town and Country Planning. Madam Speaker, in Fiji under the key Local Government initiative is to have partnership with the right development partners.

In planning our cities and towns for the future, I am pleased to announce the sharing of the Singapore experience in integrated urban solutions on urban master planning. Madam Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that as part of our partnership, Dr. Liu Thai, a renowned former City Planner of Singapore and Architect is part of the team to assist us in the planning of our towns and cities for the future. Madam Speaker, they will be in the country on the 15th of this month.

Madam Speaker, Department of Housing. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Government in announcing the formation of a new Ministry in the 2018-2019 Financial Year with a total funding of \$41.4 million. This is the Ministry of Housing and Community Development with a mandate to increase the home ownership grade, quality affordable homes, thus realising the right to housing for every Fijian as enshrined in the Fijian Constitution.

Madam Speaker, there have been a lot of talks by the Opposition in terms of informal settlements. Madam Speaker, I wish to briefly address informal settlements, our projects under the National Housing Policy. Madam Speaker, as of today, my Ministry in partnership with iTLTB and landowners have processed 32

I have just heard, one of the Members of Opposition saying that this Government has failed to formalise the informal settlements. Hear me out!

Madam Speaker, as of today, my Ministry in partnership with iTLTB and landowners have processed 32 development leases for the upgrading of these settlements. Madam Speaker, an estimated number of 15,350 Fijians will benefit from this project.

Madam Speaker, may I also inform this Honourable House that a total of around \$1.5 million has been paid to iTLTB to be paid to the members of the landowning unit. This is apart from \$685,000 that we have paid for the Newtown development. This is a fact. Do not just come here and say that nothing has happened.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport is happy with the budget it has been allocated to deliver its services. This will ensure that our people are empowered and enabled through the provision of critical infrastructure which was neglected by the previous government such as roads, jetties, bridges and delivery of basic services such as water supply and electricity.

Madam Speaker, I will focus my presentation on energy and the transport sector as these are the key drivers of development and economic growth.

Madam Speaker, Government aims to provide clean and affordable energy solution to Fiji with at least 99 percent of the energy requirements through renewable source by 2030.

Madam Speaker, the 2018-2019 Budget for the Department of Energy reaffirms Government's commitment to connect every rural Fijian community to sustainable, reliable and clean source of electricity. This is reflected in the significant increase in the budget of \$61.2 million announced for the rural electrification.

Madam Speaker, the Government is committed to further increase the use of renewable energy with the stated target of 99 percent by the year 2030. The EFL has a road map to achieve its mission by 2025 together with Government's target by 2030.

Madam Speaker, Government will continue the monthly threshold of electricity subsidy for the first 100 kilowatts used per month which confines to households with a combined income of \$30,000 or less per annum.

Madam Speaker, briefly on LTA. LTA, Madam Speaker, will continue to strengthen its enforcement and compliance strategy in areas of overloading, speeding and illegal operations.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let me add that this is a Budget that delivers for all Fijians at all times. It is a sound Budget. It is a soundly reasoned Budget. It is a Budget that witnessed the achievements of previous years to projections of future years and it is a Budget that not only promises but delivers on all accounts of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, as a sound and responsible Budget as it is one that provides for all Fijians whilst staying within our means to do so in a sustainable and responsible manner.

Madam Speaker, I thank you all and I give my support for the 2018-2019 Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That really was a new approach.

(Laughter)

I now call upon the Honourable Dr. Brij Lal to have the floor.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Minister for Economy, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Assistant Ministers, Members of Parliament, worldwide listeners and those watching this programme. Good evening to everyone.

Madam Speaker, firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for drawing up this Budget which is aimed at helping the country and each individual to develop. Congratulations on a job well done.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Almighty God for protecting and keeping us healthy and for enabling us to participate in this Parliamentary Budget debate which has touched and motivated the hearts of over 99 percent of Fijian families.

Madam Speaker, Aristotle, the father of political science said and I quote: “And the State is the union of families and villages ...”

Family is a basic union of the society which is the foundation of the State itself. Happy families breed a healthy society and a healthy society is the prerequisite for a strong political owner in a democratic society. The role of women cannot be over-emphasised. Women have been playing leading roles in shaping our nation that have contributed positively to the progress of the community. We salute all the women for the work they have done and wherever they are serving, either in the Government, private sector, operating their own businesses, working as housewives, politicians or as an ordinary citizen of this country. I appeal to all young and old to respect the women.

All forms of discrimination and abuse have to be stopped immediately and we all have to act on this together. It is very important for all of us to take care of our health, as every country needs healthy and productive citizens.

The Healthy Budget: Madam Speaker, it is noted that this year's budget continues to build on previous year's efforts in a number of other areas including income support for low and middle income earners and the pensioners, further investments in human resources, environmental industries and infrastructure developments.

The Honourable Minister for Economy has clearly explained how our money has been spent. What are our priorities? What are we facing as our challenges? He had very clearly explained Fiji's debt situation and the mode of payment, and so forth.

By July, 2017, Fiji's debt stood at \$4.7 billion, the debt to GDP rate has been decreasing in the last 15 years.

Madam Speaker, as the Deputy Chief Scout of Fiji, I would like to say *bravo* and thank you to the Honourable Minister for Economy for bringing back the Scouts in the schools of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, one of the wisdom quotes that I wish to share is:

“Hard is not a basket for keeping tension and sadness, it is a golden box for keeping roses of happiness and sweet memories.”

The future is not a gift, but an achievement. Those Fijians who use the budget initiative wisely will become wealthier, happier and healthy. Imagine if you got what you wanted every time, there will be no struggle, there will be no hard work, there will be no challenges and no hard work would be required, and some people would say that it would be great, but here I would say, no. That would make you weak. When something hard comes up in your life, you would not know how to handle that because you have never gone through that and that would weaken you. This budget is strengthening everyone, provided you do a little bit of struggle and make your life, you cannot develop strength without resistance, without challenge and without struggle.

It is said, “Pain is your friend, if you do not have failures, if you do not have struggles, if you do not have disappointments, if you do not have strength, no courage and no compassion then how can you survive? This is what this Budget is trying to instil in all the Fijians of this country. God gave you this life because you are strong enough to live it that way. You are given pain because you were strong enough to handle it, you are strong enough to drive it, to thrive it, to inspire others through and the strength to do it.

Whatever is left has been given to you through this Budget. You name it and it is there, whether it is education, infrastructure, agriculture, health, housing, scholarship, et cetera, the list is so big. This Budget has provided several initiatives and the funds. Now it is in your hands and the hands of every Fijian to grow, grow and grow. We all know that you cannot plant a seed today and expect it to become a flower overnight.

Madam Speaker, this Budget is the tree of the FijiFirst whose fruit will not be enjoyed only by us but by our children and their children.

(Acclamations)

Nelson Henderson said, and I quote: “The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit”. We are planting these trees now and it will not be blown away, it will not be blown away by any cyclone unless Opposition chops it down.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, this Budget is worth high praise indeed, not only growth, not only jobs, not only economic success but also taking care of all of our people. Every one of us, as citizen of Fiji has a reason to be proud of. We are far better off than what we were 10 years ago and all of us have seen that with our own eyes.

Madam Speaker, some people expected this Budget would be a bag of goodies. This Budget is no such thing as that. This Budget is meant to be a toolbox, full of equipment that the people need to build our nation together.

(Acclamations)

This Budget is about building Fiji for a better future, more jobs, better education and more caring.

This Budget is not for the radical departure from the previous ones, rather this Budget outlines exactly what the Government has been doing so successfully for the past few years. Indeed, FijiFirst is doing more and doing it better for the people of Fiji. We must do it even better. That is what the Budget is about.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the achievements over the past 10 years, we can see that our people have come too far to turn back now. FijiFirst, in its duty today, is expanding the economy, reports where we stand today on our jobs, on the growth, on inflation, on revenues and fiscal conditions.

Madam Speaker, for the welfare of the Fijians, the FijiFirst Government has made a commitment to bring healthcare to the community. All too often, the old system had our people forming long lines to access healthcare. Now we are making healthcare accessible to the people wherever they live. The Government is making healthcare available when our people need it and in some communities, 24 hours a day. Through provisions in this Budget, the FijiFirst Government will deliver primary healthcare services that are essential, accessible, affordable and equitable. This requires a new level of infrastructure and support services, and the Fijian families will not be deprived of this.

Maternity Leave: Madam Speaker, maternity leave is an employment protected leave or absence of employed women around the time of child birth (International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 183 and 191 strengthen these). For many, many years Fiji had allowed 84 days of maternity leave, later on it was changed to allow with full pay for the first three deliveries and later on with half pay. I congratulate the Fiji Government for extending this leave from 84 to 98 days.

This is what Mother Theresa had to say about the women, which I want to share with the women of this country and those who are in this House, and I quote:

“If your eyes are positive, you will love the world but if your tongue is positive, the world will love you. A woman’s love is in action. She looks with her heart and feels with her eyes. A woman is the bank where the family deposits the anger, the worries and the hurt. A woman is the cement that keeps the family together and that love lasts for the lifetime”.

Madam Speaker, let me read a sentence about the biggest and the largest school in the world. The world’s biggest school is City Montessori School in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India. In 2015, it

had 1,000 classrooms; 3,700 computers; 47,000 students; 3,800 staff and, Madam Speaker, would you believe me that the Head Teacher of that School is a lady.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Paternity leave is generally a short period of leave for the father immediately after child birth in order to take care of the infant and assist the mother.

The International Labour Conference, at its 98th Session in 2009 on Gender Equality at the heart of decent work, called upon governments to develop sound policies for a better balance between work and family responsibilities for those women and men, including paternity or parental leave with incentives to encourage men to take such leave.

Paternity leave is useful in the following ways because it is a new concept and we will quickly touch on this. Paternity leave boosts connection and communication between partners. When one person is at home with the new baby, and the other one remains at work, they cannot start living in a different world and have less to talk about.

New mums physically report extreme fatigue and exhaustion when caring for the infant but when dads take paternity leave, mums benefit from the lightening and get lightened by the workload that is at home.

This leave also benefits the employer and the career. Research indicates that companies who provide parental leave as well as more flexible overall, have more loyal employees, better staff, retention and high productivity levels. It enables dads to love being dads. Multiple stories report that meeting time that could be spent with infants, babies and children has an adverse effect on the dads who regret not enjoying those vulnerable moments, however, when men are able to spend time with their infants, they felt overall well-being satisfied and fulfilled.

Kids whose dads took parental leave had been shown to become more sociable when they grow up, performed better in school and even have higher Intelligence Quotients (IQs). The earlier the dads get involved in activity taking care of the kids, the more involved they will be in the long time. Children also benefit by observing the mother and the father's different style of parenting. Those benefits may even extend well into adulthood when girls having lower teenage pregnancy rates and boys have powerful father figure, stimulate their own relationship.

Time is changing and so are mums and dads. The more men acquire the courage to apply for paternity leave, businesses will reap the benefits of all these. The Government has allowed 150 percent deduction of employees on salaries and wages paid to employees being on paternity or family care leave.

Family Care Leave is time-off, a paid leave and it is taken to take care of children if spouses, parents, parenting in-laws, siblings. According to Mercer's 2016 Global Parental Leave Report, two-thirds or 67 percent of companies worldwide provide family care leave to the employees.

Parental Leave is strictly a few days fully paid, although some countries allow for extra days, et cetera.

Family Insurance: Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has proudly introduced the Family Insurance. This is to cater for those who are under the Social Welfare Recipients. The package includes life, home care, and injury. The insurance will be paid by the Government. The

scheme includes Civil Service, Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Fiji Police Force, Fiji Corrections Service, et cetera.

In case of death, \$1000 is given immediately, and when a house burns down or something of that nature, then \$3,000 is paid out. Last year, the bundle insurance was also introduced, allowing people in the cane industry, dairy, rice farmers, copra and so forth, to be taking advantage of this, where they pay \$1 a week and for the cane farmers, it was started by the Sugarcane Growers Fund.

Madam Speaker, as time is catching up, let me end with my very short story.

An old man in a small city in Saudi Arabia was breathing his last breath. People came to visit him, one of them asked the old man to speak a few words of advice and guidance on how to lead one's life before one departs the world.

The old man said "During my youth, when I was about 20 years old, I was very much energetic and enthusiastic and I thought I can the change the world and solve all the problems.

And I started working on this course. Days passed by and I became 30 years old and the world was there, and it was the same as 10 years ago and that made me realise, "maybe I should lower my ambitions", so I thought I better at least change my country

As time passed, when I became 40 years old, I realised nothing had changed and the people did not want to change, and I was just wasting my time.

(Laughter)

So, I decided to further lower my ambition so that I could change the people in my city but they did not wish to change either. When I grew very old, by that time I was around 60, which is too young, at that age, I thought that I should change my family. Although it was an easy task but it was very difficult to do. On my deathbed, now I realise that I had worked on trying to change the whole world but I have been unsuccessful. I have not been able to change my family, my country and so forth, so I decided that at the death table, if I had changed my own self, I would have changed the whole world.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, do not put problems on your head, the weight may crush you, mine I had lost my hair.

(Laughter)

Instead put them under your feet so that you can use them as a platform to climb to new horizons. All the strategies are stated in the Budget and will help you to achieve that.

Madam Speaker, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister of Economy for introducing such a powerful family budget, bringing about happiness, joy, retraining, upgrading of skills, help benefit stronger home purchasing powers, agriculture development, salary upgrade on performance, and so forth. May God richly bless this country and all of us. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also rise to present my response on the 2018-2019 Budget, as presented by the Honourable Minister of Economy. I will be focusing my response on the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs Budget allocation before sharing my thoughts on the budget allocation on the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make some generic observations on the Budget. It is critical to look at the Budget in totality and try to link it to each ministry's allocation and its impact on Fijian families. There is no doubt in my mind that this is a vote buying budget, with a lot of sugar coating to make it sweet to Fijian families, as it is also a desperate and irresponsible budget and lacks the vision for the long-term.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- I confidently say this, Madam Speaker, because its impact to Fijian families will be catastrophic in the long-term. This will be clearly illustrated when analysing the data given in the Supplement and those available from the Bureau of Statistics and the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

It is time for the Honourable Minister for Economy to tell all the Fijian families the truth that the FijiFirst Government does not really care about the long-term welfare of Fijian families. As usual, the Honourable Minister continues to mislead Fijian families that everything is rosy and that the future continues to look bright. This Budget brings to mind the saying, "you can fool some people some time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, in reviewing the Budget, it is worth noting that the FijiFirst Government continues to take an expansionary and bullies approach since it came into power after the military removed the SDL government in 2006. It is more than twelve years, Madam Speaker, no effort has been made by this Government to consolidate Government finances to reduce the deficit and anticipate future challenges.

The increase in public debt from \$2.8 billion in 2006 to almost \$5.5 billion, this is excluding contingent liability in the 2018-2019 Budget is a worrying trend, Madam Speaker.

The 2018-2019 Budget will require Government to raise an additional \$500 million from borrowing, from both domestic and international borrower. Much has been said by the Honourable Minister for Economy to defend the debt. The bottom line, Madam Speaker, is, whether it is local or foreign debt, or whether it is from China or the Asian Development Bank, debts must be paid.

As we continue to increase our debt, we also increase our exposure and this places ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Listen, Honourable Minister!

... more burden on the Fijian families. This is where I am coming from. I am sure Madam Speaker, that incentives of \$1,000 given to new mothers will continue to further increase our national debt in the long run. There are other viable policy options that are transparent yearly ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Hear me out!

... and sustainable in the long-term that will heal families, more than the one-off \$1,000 hand-out for each new born baby.

It would be practical, Madam Speaker, to consider extending and increasing the child rebate on income tax to \$1,500, basically parents can claim \$1,500 annually for every child under 18 years and those above 18 years who are still attending school, dependent on their parents, and as well as for the disabled family members. Basically, it means the parents will have more disposable income to take home.

On the civil service, particularly the teaching profession, Madam Speaker, all the CARES provided for housing and scholarships are meaningless to them without a job security. Teachers do enter the profession as a life-long career, just like other civil servants. By giving them short three-year contracts, without job security, incentives such as the Housing Subsidy, Scholarships and the \$1,000 new born baby hand-out will have little value.

Financial institutions will not give long term loans to those with three-year contracts, particularly in the purchase of a home and this affects the loan portfolio especially with the Housing Authority. Madam Speaker, before I assess whether the proposed 2018-2019 Budget is adequate for the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs, to actively carry out its stated role, I wish to speak on the role of the Government as a whole.

Indigenous people of Fiji, *iTaukei* have certain intrinsic human rights that accrue to them under various international treaties like the ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and under International Declaration of Rights like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007. This is not all discriminatory, Madam Speaker, but it is their basic human right like everyone else. The Government has embarked on a course of discrediting previous governments and national leaders.

Madam Speaker, they continue to criticise and ridicule performance of the previous governments, particularly our statesmen and traditional leaders, which is quite foreign to our kind of culture, to our way of culture. You must always appreciate the vision, the commitment, the self-sacrifice and achievements of our founding fathers and formed a government in their efforts in building our nation before and after Independence. There were many challenges that faced our newly dependent nation, particularly during the period of decolonisation. But our leaders were determined to overcome those obstacles for a better future for all of us today through dialogue and consultations.

Today, Madam Speaker, we are enjoying the fruits of their vision, sacrifice and commitment of our founding fathers and former governments. Therefore, it is important that we must not undermine or criticise their genuine efforts which some may feel were not enough but it was relevant and applicable at that point in time.

The criticism against former governments, which includes the Momi Bay land swap, after 12 years, Madam Speaker, of criticising this land swap, the Honourable Attorney-General finally admitted in Parliament on 15th May this year that it was legally correct.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- He said, and I quote, Madam Speaker, from page 1568 of the *Daily Hansard*:

“Honourable Gavoka talks about what happened in Momi. What happened in that wait? What happened in Momi with the land? What happened in Denarau with the land? Honourable Lalabalavu quite correctly says that he did it within the law and that the Constitution – the 1990 Constitution and the 1997 Constitution allowed them to convert *iTaukei* land to freehold land.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- With recognition made in this august House, the Honourable Attorney-General admitted that the demonising that he had undertaken was totally false. And I am glad the saying goes that we have come a full circle, Madam Speaker, and after 12 years of saying otherwise, he finally admitted that what SVT did in Denarau and what the SDL did in Momi was legally correct.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, that is the characteristics of the Fijian First Government to mislead the people and later the truth comes out. The truth hurts. So, while we have a Parliament, Madam Speaker, which ought to be the supreme law making body, the people of Fiji are still subject to Decrees forced on them by an unelected interim government that came to power through military intervention.

Madam Speaker, the wellbeing and good governance of the *iTaukei* people cannot be left to the Provincial Councils or the *Tikina* Councils or the Village Councils. That is the institution which is provided with their subvention grants from the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs budget.

That is why, Madam Speaker, the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* must be reinstated and SODELPA is committed to restoring that apex body to the Fijian administration.

We will see a new dawn in the coming Elections.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- It is now or never. I repeat that, “it is now or never.”

The well-being of the *iTaukei* people is not only limited to the family or a village, Madam Speaker. The word encompasses the *vanua*, the resources and their social structure, which includes their chiefs. Chiefs are synonymous with the meaning of the *vanua*. It is the *vanua* that binds the people, that show their resources, their source of sustenance, their whole being together, without the people, there is no *vanua*. Without the chief, the *vanua* is like a rudderless boat.

The governance and wellbeing of the *iTaukei* people is firstly the responsibility of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*.

Madam Speaker, the unique role of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* is to make recommendations to the government of the day for the well-being and good governance of the *iTaukei* people.

The second limb of the role statement of the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs stipulates that the duty of the Ministry is to uphold the rights of the *iTaukei* as enshrined in the Constitution over their land, fishing grounds and to their fair share of royalty from minerals that are extracted from their

land. Unfortunately, Decrees like the Surfing Decree have curtailed the *Qoliqoli* rights of the indigenous people.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- To conclude, Madam Speaker, I now wish to elaborate on SODELPA's policy on *iTaukei* affairs. In addition, to removing laws that restrict human rights and freedom of expression of individuals and the media. SODELPA has committed to review all the laws and undermine the rights of the native Fijians in the spirit the UN Declaration and ILO Convention 169 on indigenous peoples.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I emphasise that unfortunately this Budget demonstrates that the long term welfare of Fiji's families is not at the heart of this Budget. The Honourable Minister of Economy has presented a sugar coated budget which will be detrimental to the families of Fiji and as such I cannot support this Budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on the 2018-2019 Budget. May I take this opportunity to thank both, the Honourable Minister for Economy and the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy, for their addresses to this House regarding the Budget.

At the outset of my speech, I must put on record that I strongly oppose the Budget by the Honourable Minister for Economy and fully support the response by the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy.

A budget, apart from being a document that states the estimated revenue and expenditure of the Government for an annual period, Madam Speaker, is one of the most important documents presented to Parliament each year, giving us information about the state of affairs of the nation, public finances, fiscal and monetary policies and developmental programmes being earmarked for the benefit of the people and economic health and growth of the nation.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, it is no ordinary document to be brushed aside or taken lightly. It must reflect the mandate of the people bequeathed to the elected Government and the will of the people on the floor of this House by the elected representatives of the State.

As opposed to the practice and standards of the yester-years, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has been having budget consultations before presenting it which is not a bad idea, but shutting out the Opposition from having access to consult the same lot of people and organisations.

My question, Madam Speaker, finds its root noting that only 60 percent of the voters of Fiji is represented by the Government while the Opposition represents the other 40 percent of the people. Also the fact that the Government and the budget is there for all and not only for those in power as they all say, "All Fijian Families Matter." But what we see and hear or read and analyse is that only some who belong to the ruling Party matter while the others do not matter and the Government does not care.

I am wearing two hats, Madam Speaker, as the Shadow Minister for Education and also that of the Shadow Minister for Employment and beg for a few extra minutes if I do exceed my time. Madam Speaker, a lot of dust has been blown off the ground to create a smokescreen that for the first time ever, Fiji has a billion dollar education budget. I must correct the same by saying it is false. The Ministry of Education gets \$535 million while the Fiji Higher Education Commission receives

\$123 million. The total for TELS is \$205 million while for Toppers it is \$40.8 million. It totals up to \$863 million and if you add whatever else is there from Head 50, it makes more than \$1 billion. There is no \$1 billion in Head 21.

If we minus the amount for reconstruction of schools and amount for TELS which are repayable anyway, the actual allocation for the education sector is reduced back to its usual amount of nothing more than \$450 million. As for Special Schools and Fiji Higher Education Commission as well as the National Toppers allocation, it has nothing to do with the primary and secondary students.

The unnecessary heat and dust raised on this score, therefore, once again makes this Government a laughing stock because of this kind of very cheap propaganda, probably not by its choice but by its henchmen on the social media. The truth is here to stay and such false propaganda will be skinned to its bone as and when necessary by the Opposition.

On VAT, Madam Speaker, which has reduced to 9 percent, all the basic food items exempted from the tax was put under VAT. Secondly, as if that was not enough, a 10 percent Environment Levy and another 6 percent STT was slapped upon the people of Fiji. So, 9 percent VAT plus 10 percent Environment Levy plus 6 percent STT equals to 25 percent taxation as opposed to the previous 15 percent VAT. Do all Fijian families matter? No, they do not.

It must be noted here and now for the record, Madam Speaker, that the FijiFirst Party advocated in its manifesto for zero rated VAT on basic food items which were already VAT exempted then but after having reduced VAT to 9 percent, they have imposed VAT on even the basic food items and here they are talking about “*All Fijian Families Matter.*” This is hypocrisy of the highest order.

Madam Speaker, I have a number of observations to make with regards to faith-based schools which I summarise as follows:

- That 93 percent of Fiji schools are faith-based schools established and managed by faith-based communities who sowed the seeds of education by transforming the social sector of this land in the last 100 years. They occupy a significantly important space which this Government has miserably failed to accept, embrace, honour, respect and recognise.
- That no government on earth can equate the more than 50 years to 100 years of service to education by these faith-based schools by doling out freebies and large chunks of funds to schools for which they obviously account. However, there is a setting paranoia on the other side of the House that they have become the owners and operators of these faith-based schools which I must remind them that they are not and never will be.
- That this Government has torn the Fiji education sector apart by dividing and tampering with some of the most important stakeholders in the sector which includes the unions and the faith-based school managements by setting up rival school management council under the leadership of its immediate past Minister, taking over school management and tampering with school constitutions, meetings and board elections. This is simply too draconian, Madam Speaker, disconcerting and totally unacceptable for the civil society at large.

Madam Speaker, those of us who remember of the era of the 1980s when the United Nations came up with the idea of having an International Day for the Child and the Fiji Teachers Union together with the Fiji education sector coined the slogan, "*The Child – Our Hope*". That slogan remains as relevant today as it was 30 years back. The child is the most important person as our hope in the education sector. There are a number of issues we are concerned about our children in and outside the school and which I intend to raise here and now.

In the last several months, we have noticed a rapid increase in student indiscipline and the number of student offences being recorded which stands at 10 percent of the total student population. What has gone wrong to result in this to our society? Is it because the counsellors were removed from the school or child rights being advocated in the wrong context? Is it because of lack of parental guidance or effects of national leadership taking a toll on our younger generation? Is it because the policies that were piloted during the era of the immediate past Minister for Education has failed miserably or our students are up in arms realising there were legal flaws to get away with the type of offences they commit?

Student health and safety is another area of concern, Madam Speaker, for all stakeholders in the Fiji Education Sector. Apart from the lack of balanced diet, access to transportation and basic medical care in rural and maritime provinces, the students on the mainland also face some serious health and safety issues such as the level of radiation they are exposed to by the telecommunications towers installed near the schools. In a study conducted and documented by National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NASAAC), it was recommended to the Minister for Education to address the matter but until now we have seen no action being taken on this front. What is the relationship between this Government and Vodafone Fiji Limited that it is afraid to act on this matter?

On TELS, there is no data whatsoever available to us to enable us to judge who has benefitted from this initiative in terms of gender, ethnicity, province or district, income level, parental background and in what disciplines and how their qualifications would benefit them and the national economy? We are also unaware of how many students on TELS have repaid, are repaying, have got their loans cancelled or doubled up as a penalty and how many have defaulted? We are also unaware of how many of these students have found adequate jobs pertaining to their qualifications and what is the role of the Government to enable these graduates to secure job opportunities to repay and excel further in life?

We have heard, Madam Speaker, more than once in successive budgets of the allocation of 630 scholarships. Who received these scholarships, and for what and how does it benefit them and the nation is still unknown to us?

One of the billboards in the recent past carried a very funny, in fact, a ridiculous message making this Government a laughing stock when it depicted, "*More students in schools than ever before*" while one of the oldest dailies in the South Pacific published in Fiji on a daily basis reported at the same time that 777 students had dropped out of our schools. The fact that it is coloured blue and is a FijiFirst campaign material, is a breach of its own tailored Electoral Decree is another matter. But the fact remains. This is how the FijiFirst Party under the misguidance of Qorvis is hell bent on misleading the people of Fiji not realising we live in an age of information, empowerment and such antics are caught within seconds on how true they are.

Madam Speaker, the plight of the teachers under the FijiFirst Government has been the worst since Independence in 1970. When I talk about teachers, Madam Speaker, I must advise this House as a former teacher and former union representative that I am talking about 1,394 Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers, 6,210 primary school teachers and 5,566 secondary school teachers in Fiji

who total up to 13,561 teachers with families. This Budget has failed to address the issues near and dear to the heart of these Fijian families.

As a result of the Civil Service Reforms and the imposition of the Employment Relations Decree and other strings of draconian decrees, they have lost their worker rights and right to collective bargaining. The issue, Madam Speaker, faced by the teachers of Fiji can be summarised as follows and let me advise the House:

- We were told and heard and it is documented that last year this Government will recruit 200 primary school teachers and 50 secondary school teachers. The same promise is made again in this budget. However, this House as the supreme court of this land has not or never been informed by the Line Minister of how many teachers were recruited from that quota.
- Teachers are the chief architects of families and family life by imparting knowledge. The older a teacher gets, the more wisdom, expertise and knowledge he or she acquires but it appears this Government is in no mood to appreciate our elder teachers on the brink of retirement. It has lowered the retirement age to 55 years when we advocate that it should be increased to 60 years. This has affected the lives of many teachers in that age group between 55 to 60, who retired, unplanned and they ended up facing serious financial and personal problems.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Do their families matter? For us, yes. For them, no. FijiFirst does not care.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.-

- Teachers who had been promoted under the new system were demoted once again or made to act in their new positions which has affected their pay packet and instilled fear that there is no job security in the teaching fraternity. Madam Speaker, it is apparent that the FijiFirst Government was coming down upon them like a pack of vultures for the reasons best known to this Government. Our teachers, Madam Speaker, have been made to stay away from the budget consultation, treated like step children within the Civil Service and forced to the mood of resignation and migration which is going to have a catastrophic effect on the social sector specifically and national economy generally.
- It is a good initiative which we welcome that working mothers will now have more than 84 days leave supplemented by paternity leave but question in relation to the teaching and learning process is what happens if two teachers with 40 students go on these maternity and paternity leave at around the same time. One cannot control pregnancy and more so now given the \$1,000 baby grant. These will be the obstacles faced in our schools. What are the contingency measures put in place or plans to address this issue to ensure that our students do not lose out on their quality teaching and learning time? Therefore, Madam Speaker, the Opposition proposes that we have a pool of retired teachers to fill in the gap in such circumstances. The Opposition further believes that Counsellor positions taken away from the schools must be

restored while the Executive Teacher positions must be reinstated to supplement the work of the heads of schools.

- Whilst still on the issue of leave, it is appalling to note the number of leaves allocated for teachers after years of hard earned negotiations between the Government and teacher unions is now replaced unilaterally and their leaves have been reduced. This is an issue which is currently pursued by the teachers of Fiji with their unions and something which needs immediate attention and redress.

The next issue, Madam Speaker, on which I very briefly intend to speak about is Fiji Higher Education Commission. Let me assure this House that it has got nothing to do with the former Director and Chairman of the Commission who is now an NFP Candidate but the Commission itself. Firstly, we cannot see any good reason why the Fiji Higher Education Commission is listed as a separate head (Head 26) in the Budget from Head 21 which is Ministry of Education.

Secondly, when you look at the allocations, the Fiji Higher Education Commission has \$123 million of which \$19 million is under 'R', which is about 15 percent of its total allocation while \$104 million is vested under the control of the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, Head 21 - Ministry of Education has \$535 million allocation of which \$13.4 million is listed under "R" and the Honourable Minister controls the rest of the funds again. This is unprecedented and very dangerous for one Minister to amass such powers to dispense these amounts of public funds.

Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot of citations in this House before and even in this session which sounds music to our ears as well as to the rest of Fiji. We were told, Madam Speaker and heard about the nine core conventions of the United Nations, meaningful employment, collective bargaining, worker rights, industrial climate and not to forget the Small Islands Development Goals. They all advocate freedom, job-creation, decent living, fair minimum wages, labour rights and access to basic services such as food, water, shelter, clothing and health care.

That spirit is accommodated in the 2013 Constitution and Employment Relations Decree attached with caveats and that is one of the things on which Fiji is reported to the International Labour Organisation by our trade unions. It was perhaps one of the reasons that Fiji's bid to become a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council did not succeed bringing home the point of the review of all the Bill of Rights in the 2013 Constitution, the Employment Relation Decree and other draconian decrees that limit the scope of worker rights and right to collective bargaining in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, it sounds good to hear that the employee representatives and unions are invited to be part of the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) meetings but the fact is, they are not invited there to give advice or to hear the views of the employees. They are made to sit down and listen and send away and reports are sent to Geneva that all these decisions are made in consultation with the representatives of the union. This is the truth on ERAB.

Madam Speaker, having said that, it would be amiss if I do not touch a part of the Civil Service or reform and leave some of the other sticky areas to the Honourable Opposition Whip to speak upon the FijiFirst Government assured the nation to hire independent person, organisation to carry out the reforms or make recommendations for such a review. Who was that person or organisation selected and how much were they paid or are still being paid or left to be paid for these nature of reforms?

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Civil Service has spoken in this House for more than once on the Civil Service Reforms saying it will benefit the nation, the civil servants and

everyone but that is not the case now. It only benefits this government to hold the civil servants to ransom and manipulate them as they wish. Today, our civil servants, Madam Speaker, are working in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation as never ever before. There are unprecedented levels of fear in them and their families and the FijiFirst does not care.

That brings me to the issue of National Minimum Wage, Madam Speaker. A SODELPA government will implement a \$4 per hour as National Minimum Wage and restore worker rights and the right to collective bargaining. While we thank the FijiFirst Government for legislating the National Minimum Wage which is part of the SDL Multi-Party Government agenda, we wish to express our gross disappointment at the fixing of the National Minimum Wage firstly at the \$2.32 per hour and now a meagre \$2.68 per hour. This is not enough keeping in mind a number of factors:

- High cost of living;
- Indirect taxes; and
- Access to services.

Those unemployed dependents in each family whose national toll now exceeds the unemployment rate of the United States at the time of its Great Depression in the 1930s.

Madam Speaker, we are always told here in this House and outside that our economy is growing and our finances are in good position than ever before. If this is the case then why are our infrastructure in such a pathetic state while many developments at the grassroots level continue pending, despite numerous reminders, correspondence, requests and calls in the District Advisory Councils, *Tikina* Councils and Provincial Council meetings. Let me ask the Honourable Minister of Economy and other Honourable Ministers some very important questions before I sum up which are as follows.

Madam Speaker, if all is well and all Fijian families matter then why roads in Deuba/Vunibau, Waidova Road in Navua and other roads in Serua are in urgent needs of maintenance work and yet to be in a condition of being unfit for public use. There are other roads facing similar problems such as the:

- Serua Island Road;
- Culanuku Road;
- Waibogi/Wainadiro Road;
- Vunaniu Bridge;
- Naboutini Feeder Road;
- Namaqumaqua Road; and
- Nabukelevu Road.

Madam Speaker, if all is well and all Fijian families matter then why villages such as Waidradra and Lapanoni in Serua are still not recognised as Villages or Galoa for that matter which is situated on State land and it belongs to the Public Trustee. We need it to be reverted to the landowners.

Madam Speaker, if all is well and all Fijian families matter then why the Fiji Roads Authority is not putting up speed humps along the Queens national highway from Waidradra to Nadroga border near to the villages along the route to save lives from speeding motorists.

Madam Speaker, if all is well and all Fijian families matter then why the Ministry of Waterways has failed to address the drainage issues faced by our people.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I must record my sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks to you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, all the Honourable Members of both sides of the House, the Parliamentary staff for all your assistance and guidance during my tenure of office.

I also wish to place on record my special thanks to my Party - Social Democratic Liberal Party, all my voters, my family, my wife, friends and the *Vanua* of Serua for their unwavering support during this time.

Madam Speaker, this is a mirage Budget. I say so because when a camel travels to the desert and views the sand shining in a distance it thinks there is a pond of water and it walks towards it. The further it moves, the distant the mirage moves. This is how this Budget is devised, full of false hopes. The more you believe in the Qorvis propaganda, the more you get mesmerised with it, the further one gets divorced from reality.

Madam Speaker, I cannot compromise the future and security of Fijian families, our teachers, students, schools and unions matter the most to me. Thus, Madam Speaker, I oppose the Budget 2018-2019 and I call upon all the right-thinking Honourable Government Members to do the same. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Economy, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members and those watching from the comforts of their homes: a very good evening to you all.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to give my contribution towards the National Budget.

Firstly I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for such a comprehensive Budget. Madam Speaker, since 2014 day in, day out, the Opposition have been criticising every Budget that Government has been delivering, not understanding that the Budget is one thing and turning blind eyes towards reality is another. While every Fijian family looks forward to seeing what is in store for them in the National Budget, the Opposition tends to read in between the lines so that they can manipulate first, criticise it, contradict and outsmart each other in their speeches.

Ever since the Budget was announced, a lot has been said by leaders of other political parties represented in Parliament by a few seats and those not represented in Parliament due to rejection from the people because of baseless arguments and opinions that has and will lead to their demise. They absolutely have no idea of the vision of FijiFirst. Their vision is of rear view, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition can praise the Budget announcements. Clearly, she endorsed it and clearly she might be the only Honourable Member in Opposition who is able to look beyond her nose and knew clearly what this budget was all about for the people, families, children and their future.

On the other hand there are other leaders who go out to the *Fiji Times* to criticise the Budget and maybe inform the leader within the Parliament that she needs to oppose the Budget and not support it. One can only imagine the shock and confusion from the Opposition Members and there misinformed support base. This is totally confusing to me also as I only know the Leader of

Opposition who was voted in by her supporters in Parliament for the very reason, however, the so-called leader outside Parliament, who now has opposed her support for the National Budget.

One can only imagine the shock the Opposition received that in that shock they went out and started praising the Budget.

Madam Speaker, day in and day out we hear Members of Oppositions sing tunes of fear and doomed to the nation and yet, Madam Speaker, the same Opposition are so fond of riding on government policies and enjoying the benefit this FijiFirst Government has provided.

Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji and families of Fiji are not duty-bound to be fooled by politicians who only think about their political career and social elevation. Changing, modifying, lying about the FijiFirst policy would not win the votes.

The Opposition, Madam Speaker, has never and will never come up with new ideas on Fiji's future and its economic developments. Madam Speaker, majority in the Opposition have labelled this Budget as an Elections Budget. Was not last year's Budget also tagged as an 'Elections Budget'? So, when will some people understand that it is not an Election Budget but rather a continuity of the development Budget which FijiFirst Government has been giving year after year and that too in line with Government policy along with five and twenty years' National Development Plan.

It clearly shows the vision of FijiFirst Government and its delivery and we shall continue to deliver for the next four years and beyond. Hats off to our Honourable Prime Minister for always taking the principal stand and ensuring that the party remains on the part of making Fiji a modern nation. If it was Election's Budget it would have been very easy for us to increase the minimum wage rate, remove TELS or convert it to scholarship. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Economy would have collected all other parties' manifesto, place them together and address it in this Year's Budget but FijiFirst will not be fooled by your strategies.

(Applause and acclamation)

While Opposition were expecting this to happen, they were really shaken when this did not eventuate. Such realistic manifestos by certain political parties will only deter Fiji's progress as a nation.

While talking about scholarships, it reminded me that I should inform all students studying under the TELS programme. Currently, student must have recently heard a former Prime Minister announcing that all TELS would be converted to scholarship. I would like to give some facts as I was a student back in 1990 an early 2000. Previously, there were three categories of scholarships and these scholarships were not offered on merit but rather on basis of ethnicity and on social status.

(Hon. Members interject)

If you read the manifesto or now so-called "Draft Manifesto of SODELPA", it quite clearly states there that they will assess all TELS and decide. This shows, Madam Speaker, that conditions based on ethnicity will be brought back and scholarships that will be awarded will be biased.

(Hon. Members interject)

The other issue that I would like to ask is if SODELPA Party coverts TELS to grant and the student does not have to repay loan, where in the Budget are they planning to offset it?

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Which development plan are they going to slash in order to compensate for \$917 million? Dear student, Yes! you heard it right, by the end of this financial year, FijiFirst would have invested about \$1 billion, \$970 million to be exact through TELS loan so the student can study at tertiary level. Has any Government ever invested so heavily in our youths and in their education?

HON. GOVT MEMBERS.- No!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No, Madam Speaker. The best investment any Government can do is in the education sector as it will give the best returns to the country in the future but it is also the responsibility of a responsible government like FijiFirst to ensure that such policies are sustainable, Madam Speaker.

Had this been an Election Budget, the Honourable Minister for Economy would have easily announced the same thing along the same line but I am grateful that the FijiFirst Government thinks beyond our nose. FijiFirst thinks about the future. FijiFirst thinks about sustainability in future. You cannot bring in policies that would in the future see us comprise our development plan, Madam Speaker. It is this FijiFirst Government who has in nominal figure invested in education and capital development far more than what used to be the total annual budget during the Alliance government, SVT government, Labour government and SDL government.

(Honourable Member interjects)

(Applause)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- During the SVT government, they used to present budget worth \$600 million to \$800 million and now all of a sudden, they want to let go of Government fund worth almost \$1 billion. What a way to tell the people of Fiji how bad they are when it comes to managing public funds and financial management, Madam Speaker. So, if they do decide to let it go of almost \$1 billion, they are either going to slash FRA budget, Water Authority budget, EFL grid extension budget, free education budget, Madam Speaker.

They need to get money from somewhere and definitely they cannot reduce the operating costs unless they are planning to decrease the salary of civil servants so I ask, how can they sustain such policies and the economy at large, Madam Speaker? Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, this is what will happen, once again people will be left in dark in rural areas, people would have to fetch untreated water from wells and creeks. Taking the road condition back to the standard where it used to take 11 hours to travel from Daria to Labasa Town, Madam Speaker.

It is quite obvious now that Opposition is playing their cards anyway and it is no longer about forming the next Government but rather retaining the number of seats they already have in Parliament. They know very well their seats are slowly slipping away.

This morning, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member, while in his response talked about the modernisation of Fiji starting in 1970. Were this part of modernisation so 1970 to 2005, Elections were held on ethnic lines.

Scholarships were given on ethnic lines, promotion of civil servants had all other requirements, except merit. Fiji citizens were recognised as Fijians, Indo-Fijians and Others. Land snatched from *iTaukei* landowners, namely Momi Bay and Denarau; lease money were only

distributed to certain people and not all the members of *mataqali* and race-based policy. If this is the modernisation model he was talking about since 1970 until 2005, then please, we do not need such modern nation.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We need a modern nation which our Honourable Prime Minister has envisioned for Fiji, “One nation, one people, one vote - leaving no one behind.” Leaving no one in the dark, giving access to free education to every Fijian, improving health facilities, assisting farmers in agriculture sector and much more. Madam Speaker. Why were such initiatives of living a modern nation announced in budgets prior to 2006?

Let me highlight some of them, Madam Speaker: Parenthood Assistance, rehabilitation and construction of schools in public buildings, assistance in dialysis, reducing electronic fees, insurance policies for home, insurance for welfare assistance recipients, TELS, accelerated repayment method of TELS, *Girmit* celebration, recognising their hard work and sugar pride, along with other ongoing projects in infrastructure development,

It is important to note, Madam Speaker, what the debt levels were from 2001 to 2006, compared to 2006 to 2018. The total country’s debt in 2000 was \$1.8 billion and in 2006, it rose to \$2.8 billion. The rate at which it was increasing by now, it would have increased four-folds had SDL remained in power,

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- ... especially when borrowing by the SDL government was to cater for operational expense and not capital expense, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- This figure shows, Madam Speaker, what the reality is, so what they were talking about this morning that the debt level is not \$4.7 billion but \$6 billion to \$7 billion is in fact not correct. Once again they have just plucked out figures from air, Madam Speaker. The FijiFirst Government is empowering every Fijian families to make decisions on their own. The best way to do this is through investing in education, Madam Speaker.

For any nation to progress, it is important to have consistent policies. We should be reflected in the National Budget. This Budget is no different to other budgets that had been presented to this Parliament by the Honourable Minister for Economy for the past four years.

It has a clear vision that in order to have a strong nation, we need to have a strong community, and in order to have a strong community, and we need to have a strong family. As the saying goes that everything starts at home.’ The way the Government has involved every individual and families in the 208-2019 Budget has touched people’s hearts. The Budget is expressed in such a way that every Fijian feels part of such a comprehensive and inclusive Budget, Madam Speaker.

For the past so many years, a lot has been said about the Free Medication Scheme and to add to that, Honourable bus owner stands and talks about free medication and his failure in the Parliament, while a pharmacy owner in Parliament continues to service the people, an ordinary Fijians are reaping the benefits out of that Scheme, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So I leave it to the people to decide whose word they can trust with regards to Free Medication Scheme, Madam Speaker, a pharmacist or a bus operator.

(Laughter)

So I wonder, where he is getting his information from. First of all, we need to be very clear that almost 500 medications are dispensed for free, if you visit any public hospital. Free Medication Scheme is just an extension of dispensing 142 medications through private pharmacies.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, pharmacy business has always been a service provider and social responsibility has always been part of our ethical practice. What people need to realise is that free medication consists of 142 medications only. Secondly, not everyone qualifies for the free medication scheme. Families earning less than \$30,000 only qualify for the scheme. Thirdly, the patient needs to have a prescription in order to access this medication.

Madam Speaker, what Opposition Members are doing when they very well know what the policy is, they still tend to advise people and the general public something that is totally the opposite. You go to an Opposition, they will take a prescription, and everything is covered. You should be covered with everything. That is not how it works, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I keep about 4,000 different types of medication in my pharmacy and we cannot just put all of them under the medication scheme.

Professionals and experts have met and come up with a list containing vital and essential medication to be dispensed through the medication scheme. There are some pharmacies out there, Madam Speaker, who have tried their level best to ensure this programme fails and they are the ones who have been feeding Opposition with false information about overstocking, stock expiry, pharmacies not having enough storage space to shelve the medication along with out of stock issue.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, pharmacies are no longer loaded with stock. Pharmacies go to an extent to extend short expiry product with their own products so that stocks do not expire on the shelves. The new policies allowing pharmacies to handle stock logistic will ensure further enhancement of the initiative and that will benefit many Fijians.

Madam Speaker, with these words I would like to show my full support towards the 2018-2019 Budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Maharaj. Parliament will now adjourn for one hour to allow all Honourable Members to have dinner while it is still hot. We will resume one hour from now which is at 8.50 p.m. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.47 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.51 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members, you may be seated. I now call upon the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to have the floor.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the 2018-2019 Budget.

I join all the Honourable Members on the Opposition side to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for his Budget presentation, though we do not agree with most of what he has presented, he could have done better, but he did not, for the reasons best known to him.

I also wish to congratulate the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy for his spirited response to the Budget which I fully agree, support and endorse on the floor of this House and I urge the people of Fiji to listen to the truth that Honourable Aseri Radrodro has put as it is. It is time Fiji knows the full truth about this Budget and this Government.

I will not mince my words but say that I am in total agreement with the Shadow Minister for Economy on the following specific issues in addition to the rest of the matters he highlighted in his speech:

- Over taxation of the people of Fiji;
- Narrow scope of revenue generation;
- Dangers of falling in a debt trap and its effects upon Fiji;
- Failure of this Government with regard to its expenditures;
- Government services not translating into good development models;
- Poor wages and high cost of living, making our people poorer by each passing day; and
- Need for a change of leadership and direction of this country for the good of all.

Madam Speaker, all the speeches I have heard from the Government side so far have failed to bring in any fresh air in this House. They were all banal in nature, full of old and tired verses, lacking the appeal of 2014. It is a sign of a government out-living itself on the eve of its last Budget debate.

On the contrary, the Opposition has proved its intellectual capacity once again by introducing fresh and innovative ideas worthy of consideration. This is what Fiji needs – a leadership that listens and cares about our families.

Madam Speaker, I will speak on the Fiji Police Force, Youth and Sports, and if I have some time left at the end of my speech, I intend to end by asking some striking questions about the failures of the often said nine years of economic growth.

Madam Speaker, I have a number of observations to make about the Fiji Police Force which are as follows:

1. The Fiji Police Force was one of the first departments established by the Colonial Administration in Fiji under two different umbrellas, namely the Auxiliary Defence Constabulary and the Native Arms Constabulary. Upon the creation of the then Royal Fiji Military Forces, the two units were separated.

2. The Fiji Police Force carries out a number of important duties which includes recording crimes data, investigations, prosecutions, supervision of community work, community policing, traffic and patrol, Fiji Police Band and Police Dog Unit services, Laboratory and Forensic activities and dealing with INTERPOL and working with other State authorities for Bio-security and to protect life and property.
3. Madam Speaker, very recently we carried out an amendment to the Crimes Decree imposing higher penalties for assault upon our police officers when the Honourable Attorney-General took umbrage to talk about the incarceration of the Commissioner of Police and his Deputy in 1987, but failed to make mention of how the RTU was disarmed a few days before the military *coup* in 2006. This is how we have crippled our Police Force.

In the recent past, as it was the case from 2007 to 2014, the Police was used as private mercenaries of this Government to torture and kill people and very recently to trample upon the sacred soil of Bau Island in combat gear to arrest Ratu Epenisa Cakobau. This has further eroded the standing, image and repute of the Fiji Police Force led by not a career police officer but a military henchman of this Government.

4. As if that was not enough, the Police Force being part of our essential services have been denied their worker's right, their right of collective bargaining since they cannot form or associate with trade unions to agitate for their wages and salaries and better conditions. We may have increased their wages and salaries or allowances but our Police Force is still poorly equipped in the terms of resources available to them and the situations under which they live and work around Fiji.

Therefore, the Opposition, Madam Speaker, welcomes the Fiji Police Force Service Reform Programme announced in this Budget with reservations. Our reservations are based on some fundamental issues which I intend to share in this House.

In this Budget, the Fiji Police gets \$193.5 million as opposed to the \$148 million it got in the last budget. That is an increase of \$45.5 million out of which \$24 million is earmarked for the Fiji Police Service Reform Programme. We are further told that this programme will take four to five years to complete and it is anticipated that similar nature of funding would be needed during this reform period. Our question is on the basis of this magical figure was calculated to say that it will cost Fiji approximately \$100 million to reform its police service.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, we intend to raise the question about the presence and absence of a White Paper or a Blueprint for this Reform Programme to analyse the basis of the review and how it is structured and will be implemented. While we agree with the need for the reforms, we need to be advised what is the review since we would not like to end with another case of Civil Service Reform enslaving our police officers as we have enslaved the Civil Servants.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, we the Opposition and the nation is alarmed at the Fiji Police Service Reform given the leadership of the Fiji Police Force from the Military ranks. We are worried whether this is another step towards the militarisation of the Fiji Police Force because apart from Mr. Ravi Narayan, the former Commissioner of Police, no other Police Commissioner since 2006 came from the ranks of the Fiji Police Force. They were all from the military service. This is demoralising the Police Force because no one in the Force can now aspire to lead the Force in their policing career under this Government.

Having laid our reservations, Madam Speaker, I join this Honourable House to welcome the regularisation of the Special Constables in the Fiji Police Force which was long overdue and I thank the Government for taking the bold step.

A few words on the Duavata Initiative, Madam Speaker, which is a noble concept provided that Government agreed to fund the community policing in Fiji. There is a notion seeping in this country aided and abetted by the Qorvis propaganda that we go the Singaporean way. Well, if that is the way, let me inform this House that in Singapore, the Government funds for the community policing. Not only the law in Singapore allows for citizen's arrest and at one time seven out of every ten arrests in Singapore was a citizen arrest. Madam Speaker, similar proposals were made by the community policing committee throughout Fiji for the amendment of the Fiji Police Act but it remains pending while those proposing the changes have been checked out.

The last issue that I wish to speak in relation to the Fiji Police Force is the criminal incidents itself. For the first ever, Fiji is rocked with kind of criminalised environment leading to the gross decay in our moral and social values. Four years go, this Government came into power on the issue of safety and security of life and property. How secure are we when our high chief was checked out of his home at gun point in the early morning hours to Nausori Police Station?

Four years ago, Madam Speaker, this Government came into power on the issue of safety and security of life and property. How secure are we when temples are broken into, statues are damaged and valuables are looted from places of worship? Four years ago this Government came into power on the issue of safety and security of life and property. How secure are we when substance abuse and incidents of crimes against morality such as annoying females, indecent assault, rape and incest are all time? Four years ago this Government came into power on the issue of safety and security of life and property. How secure are we when people continue to be arrested without arrest warrants, beaten up, left to die or are actually tortured to death in our police stations?

Madam Speaker, in my capacity as the Shadow Minister for Youth and Sports and as a former sportsman and official of the Fiji National Team, I have asserted more than once that arts and sports pays some of the highest wages and salaries to artists and sportspersons throughout the world. We just have to examine the legacy of Mr. Waisale Serevi and Mr. Roy Krishna to digest this truth.

Now, Madam Speaker, realising the fact that not every athlete can be a Serevi or Krishna, we have to recognize the other important factors about arts and sports such as the income it generates, opportunities it creates and moreso sanitizing it as a means to longevity and good health curbing and controlling cases of NCDs in Fiji and the Pacific.

With this in mind, Madam Speaker, the Opposition is quite frustrated like thousands of athletes, local sporting clubs and national sporting fraternity about the problems we are facing in booking for grounds from the Fiji Sports Council together with the amount of fees or charges being levied upon hire of Fiji Sports Council facilities which I humbly submit needs immediate and urgent review for the promotion of arts and sports in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of sporting facilities managed, owned and operated by the Fiji Sports Council and some places without any major sporting facilities. Keeping these factors in mind, Madam Speaker, if I may the following questions to my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports who is yet to speak.

1. Why is the FMF Dome being repaired now on the eve of elections when it had been needing urgent repairs for some time now?

2. How much was given by the ANZ Bank to obtain the naming rights and what is being done by the ANZ Bank to ensure that the National Stadium remains in a good shape for use to host national, regional and international events?
3. Last year, there was an allocation of \$5.6 million in the budget for the development of Nabouwalu Town and still Nabouwalu sits as it was. Is there any plan by the Government to include sporting facilities as part of its development plans for Nabouwalu Town for the people of Bua Province? My second home.
4. Lami is fast emerging as a growing town as the expansion of the Capital City of Suva now moves towards the West. Is there any intention on the part of the Government to develop sporting facilities for the people of Lami and Suvavou area?

Similarly, Madam Speaker, Government has been paying some attention to the development of Korovou to Lautoka region in North-Eastern Viti Levu. We fully support the initiative and idea and while doing so wish to question whether there are plans to develop any sporting facilities in Korovou for the people of Verata, Sawakasa, Dawasamu, Wainibuka and another one at Vaileka for the people of Ra Province?

Madam Speaker, we still await the construction of the sporting complex in Vunidawa for the people of Naitasiri in the past four years; nothing has been done.

Ganilau Park in Savusavu Town needs further upgrading and face lift as the town is now a port of entry and enjoys a wide variety of sporting activities and skills. Keeping this in mind, can the Government spell out its agenda on what plans it has to place, if any, for the further development of Ganilau Park, moreso, the park being named after one of our statesman and a former Tui Cakau, the late Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau?

Madam Speaker, before I finish off, let me not shy away from the challenge thrown by the Honourable Minister for Economy on the issues of nine years of economic growth. There may or may not have been that growth but let him and his Ministers answer me on these questions:

1. If indeed there was nine years of economic growth, then why could not this Government save only \$3 million to establish the Wainadoi Water Scheme which would have brought the much needed relief to 5,930 residents of Wainadoi in Namosi?
2. If indeed there was nine years of economic growth then why did this Government not carry out the dredging of Navua River which poses as a single most dangerous threat to the lives and property of the Navua plains?
3. If indeed there was nine years of economic growth then why could not this Government put boulders along the Waidova Settlement in Serua, across the Navua River, opposite the Navua Town to save the Uni Farm Fiji Limited and Waidova Settlement from facing dreaded prospect of getting washed away in the next few floods?
4. If indeed there was nine years of economic growth then why could not this Government construct the seawall along Veivatuloa district in Namosi to save Togoru, Naimelimeli, Lobau and Veivatuloa from the effects of climate change?

5. In indeed there was nine years of economic growth then why could not this Government establish one new industry to give a boost to the dormant Navua economy putting its land and labour to productive creating job opportunities locally?
6. If indeed there was nine years of economic growth then why could not this Government carry out the developments promised to the people of Namosi Province as noted by the *Tikina* Council and Namosi Provincial Council meetings in the recent years especially a river crossing for Saliadrau Village in Namosi?

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the *vanua* of Namosi and all my personal supporters for giving me this four years of opportunity to serve them in Parliament for a third term. I am further grateful to them for endorsing me to contest the General Elections this year and am looking forward to another successful term and this time on the Government benches with a SODELPA Government.

I will fail in my duty, Madam Speaker, if I do not thank you, the Honourable Members of this House, our Parliamentary staff, my family, my campaign and constituency team, and all those people who organised and continued to offer me support and guidance to see Namosi gradually develop.

I wish to assure this House and my voters as well as the people of Namosi specifically and Fiji generally that I dedicate myself to the cause of a free, just, united and prosperous Fiji with a leadership that listens.

On the same token, I call upon the people of Fiji to join us on this journey. There is no looking back. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Minister for Economy, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: before I continue with my speech, Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Fiji Roads Authority for the maintenance and the road upgrading in the Naitasiri Province. Naitasiri is the second biggest Province in Fiji and the Government has really cared about this Province. No other government has done it before, this Government has done a lot for Naitasiri, Madam Speaker.

As the Honourable Attorney General and the Minister for Economy has already said, this is a Budget for empowerment. How true that is? It is a Budget which has taken us further down the road of developing our country and empowering the people of Fiji to live better and more productive lives.

Fiji is a country rich in natural, potential and human resources. However, this is a work in progress and follow years of maladministration. The Bainimarama Government has steadily worked at targeted and achievable progress in key areas. This Budget is another key step in that direction.

I would like to use the analogy of farming at its most basic. A good farmer clears the land of rubbish and carefully prepares the soil so his crop will take root or germinate. He then carefully fertilisers the soil and plants his crops, but that is not all, he must then keep the crop free of weeds and pests which might destroy or reduce his crop. Finally, when the crop is ready, it would be harvested and taken to market.

Yes, Madam Speaker, so it is with our national economy and our national well-being. We must first clear away the rubbish of the past and rid ourselves of wasteful and unhelpful practices. We must provide circumstances where our people are sufficiently knowledgeable to select the right crop or other area of productivity and put in place the techniques and resources which enable them to flourish.

There is no longer any place for short-sighted thinking and the strangling weeds of nepotism, cronyism, and corruption. We must start from a clear and well-prepared field and ensure that every step along the way is taken to ensure a good harvest for each family and the nation as a whole.

The same applies to agriculture, fisheries, forestry and other forms of businesses. We need to equip our people with advanced skills and best practices to make our economy grow. That is why education for every citizen, not just the privileged, is so critical. That is why our education should be a continuing life long process, so we enhance our skills and knowledge and keep abreast of world best practices.

I am very happy that the 2018-2019 Budget allocation, Fijian education will be a record amount - 22 percent of national expenditure for Education to improve the prospect of our children and help build the national economy.

Without this emphasis on education, this essential preparation for life and national development, we will continue to under-achieve. It is a core plan in the FijiFirst philosophy that all Fijians regardless of ethnicity, social status, wealth or place of residence should have a good basic education and the opportunity to continue to improve their education throughout life.

This is what we firmly believe that this is what we will do. I am particularly proud and encouraged by training of additional teachers and for upgrading the skills and qualifications of existing teachers and civil servants. No sector within our community can afford to rest on their laurels and continue to just get by.

We must all strive to be the best we can do. We should never allow our decisions, a noteworthy example is the target funding for the sugar industry, to make it more competitive in an already very competitive international market. It is no good producing a good crop if you cannot sell it for a decent price. It helps no one if our cane farmers are impoverished and discouraged into leaving the industry.

FijiFirst is right behind our cane farmers and the whole sugar industry. We want it to succeed and prosper because this is good for the nation as a whole. So many people such as mill workers, cane cutters, machinery merchants and many others depend on this industry. FijiFirst stands shoulder to shoulder with them.

I commend the new budgetary allocation to cover the cost of initial development costs and premiums for Home and Crop Insurance. As we know the cost of natural disasters is a heavy and sometimes insurmountable burden for the victims. It is right that we should look at formulating decent and affordable insurance cover. As we all know, natural climate events are a fact of life in this part of the world and we should facilitate the alleviation of that risk in the national interest.

I note with great interest the allocation of funding to build up the goat industry. Not only should Fiji be self-sufficient in red meat and milk but also look to take advantage of the rapidly growing international market for those products. I consider this industry, properly resourced and managed, has enormous potential.

Another commendable initiative is to improve the national dairy herd by eliminating tuberculosis and brucellosis infected cattle and providing high quality replacement cattle. This is an informed and educated Fiji, will contribute to solving or reducing these problems.

Once we plant the seed of education, we must keep the crop growing until it reaches its full potential. It is something which must be tended lovingly. Not many families can afford to give their children a good education and keep them in education with the help of government. This is all the more so after students leave school.

I commend the TELS and National Toppers Scheme. We must give every student every chance to reach their true potential or we will simply waste our best resource - our young people. We can no longer afford to channel our education budget down the path of inequality to improve the prospects of already privileged members in our society. The FijiFirst philosophy stands a fair chance for every child.

Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama Government are good farmers. We must not let politics dictate how we cultivate and produce our national crop. As the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy has said in this excellent Budget speech, every step forward must be properly informed and based on rational decision-making in the national interest. We need to objectively identify our strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to come up with the best tactics to take our country forward. We must be ruthless in prevention and eradication of the weeds and pests which will restrict the way forward.

Just as is education, the budgetary allocations for agriculture are the subject of carefully considered and calibrated essential step in attaining self-sufficiency in dairy products and mitigating a potential public health risk.

In the fisheries sector, a new allocation has been made to develop a new local fish source. Farmed fish offer great potential as a source of high quality healthy protein and by providing rural communities with an alternative income and employment stream. Aquaculture is widely practised in many overseas countries and there is no reason why it should not be successful in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the process of structured national growth and development from the ground roots up is one of the greatest achievements of the Bainimarama Government. Enormous progress has already been made and this 2018 – 2019 Budget will take the nation further along the right path. We owe it to the nation, to our children and their children, to succeed in this endeavour. I sincerely urge our Opposition to get behind this endeavour in a show of national unity in such an important task.

To succeed in that endeavour, we need to step away from the evils of self-interest, nepotism and corruption of the past. We need to approach this task with policies based on facts, reason and honesty. Madam Speaker, I sincerely believe this is what this Budget does, and I commend it to the House.

Before I sit down, may I express my personal thanks and appreciation to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his staff for their excellent work in preparing this Budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, now I give the floor to the Honourable Ruveni Nadalo.

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members of

Parliament; I rise to support the Budget presented by the Honourable Minister for Economy on 28th June, 2018. This Budget speaks for itself as it caters for everyone and everything. There are so many opportunities that have been opened up for the citizens of Fiji. Congratulations to the FijiFirst for presenting such a powerful Budget.

Madam Speaker, the Fijians have now realised that while we still rely on crops like sugarcane, *yaqona*, *dalo*, ginger, coconuts and et cetera, this Government has introduced several initiatives for our people to start of something different which would bring in revenue.

The definition of Agriculture is:

- Practice of cultivating of land or raising stock;
- A large scale farming enterprise;
- Class of people engaged in growing food; and
- The Agriculture Ministry that administers programs that provide services to farmers, including research and soil conservation and efforts to stabilise the farming economy.

Madam Speaker, according to the 2022 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda, the Agriculture sector contributes around 7 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Sugar remains a significant industry employing an estimate 200,000 while sugar export account for 18 percent of Fiji's domestic export, non-sugar export account for approximately 3.8 percent. Major non-sugar agricultural export include fruits like pawpaw and vegetables, including root crops while most fruits and vegetables are sold fresh, there are few establishments engaged in the processing of local fruits and vegetables, many for domestic markets and in producing fruit juices concentrate like pineapple, orange, guava, mango, passion fruit and other citrus fruit juices.

A small volume of certified organic products, including coconuts and fruit products and neurosurgical is exported. The Government's Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda aims drive transformation of the sector to commercial scale agriculture. To encourage an investment in agriculture and agro-processing, the Government's initiative, include tax exemption where new business established before 31st December, 2018.

The length of tax holiday is dependent on the level of capital investments. The investments of approximately US\$0.9 million, equivalent to FJ\$2 million or more, companies are eligible for 13 years tax holiday. Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) with a maximum turnover threshold of approximately US\$235 or FJ\$500 in selected sectors are also taxed exempted. The importation of all agricultural items for commercial agriculture and agro-processing establishment is subject to zero duty.

The Government subsidises the cost of fertilisers, feeds and chemicals through a fertiliser subsidy for non-sugarcane farmers, including ginger farmers and farmers in the dairy and livestock sector. In Fiji, agriculture continues to be the backbone of the economy, with farmers engaging in commercial, semi-commercial and majority subsistence farming.

Madam Speaker, there are however factors affecting the production of farmers with some at the disadvantage economically due to their remote locations, road access, poor connections and climatic conditions. These areas have agro-ecological conditions that offer potential for growth and improvement and due to factors affecting them, supply response to growing demand for domestic produce has been weak.

This is the target of the various agricultural programmes in the 2018-2019 Budget, where the Ministry of Agriculture is providing assistance for growing:

- Pineapple farming;
- Fruit growing;
- Piggery;
- Poultry (including ducks);
- Goat farming;
- Rice;
- Ginger;
- Coconut;
- Cocoa;
- Vanilla;
- *Dalo*;
- *Yaqona*;
- Potatoes; and
- Vegetables.

The demand for food in Fiji and elsewhere is growing. That trend is likely to continue as the disposable incomes increases and the changes in consumption patterns favour value-added foods.

However, supply is constrained by marginal productivity gains in a majority of crops, the shrinking amounts of arable lands, erratic weather patterns, climate changes affect the poor attitude of farmers. The reduction of available labour in the agricultural fields make the situation worse.

Madam Speaker, given the importance of agriculture in Fiji, both the Government and the private sector are working to improve the efficiency and the productivity of Fijians. Agriculture, in exploring how farming as a service solution can play a role.

The FijiFirst Government, through this Budget and in its past budget, seeks to provide affordable technology solution for efficiency farming. It converts fixed costs into variable cost for farmers, thus making the techniques more affordable for majority of small farmers. Its services are available on a very minimal pay per user business.

Madam Speaker, the Government is providing subsidies for:

- Land ploughing, planting, fertilisers, insecticides and even delivery;
- Production assistance on site resource to a production such as equipment rentals; and
- Access to market which will lay platforms that provide farmers with the supplies of seeds, fertilisers and other agro-chemicals as well as consumers for their produce.

Small scale remote farmers and many other actors along the agriculture value chain face structural constraints in marketing, transport, handling and processing.

The agricultural sector has experienced massive financial losses due to floods and cyclones over the past 10 years, dating back to 2008. Based on the current prices, the Fiji Bureau of Statistics estimate a 27 percent decline in the total agricultural output from 2007 until 2010. With the Government support, the sector has shown signs of recovery; thanks to the Government for all its efforts.

The FijiFirst Government, led by the Honourable Prime Minister, has introduced several reforms to help our farmers. A number of these initiatives are shown in this powerful Budget. Madam Speaker, let me quote a short poem the Powers of poem by Dr. Brij Lal. *The Power of God Can Kill* by Tupac Shakur of India and reworded by our very own Dr. Brij Lal.

“The power of a gun can kill and the power of fire can burn.
The power of wind can chill and the power of a mind can learn.
The power of anger can rage inside until it tears you apart
but the power of a smile, especially yours can heal a frozen heart,
and most importantly the power to till the land will keep the smile for you,
the family and the nation for no one can survive without the food produced from the land.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, I now urge the youths of Fiji to take up farming, take advantage of the various assistance that this Government is providing and make a joyful living.

Madam Speaker, whenever we go to the market, there are only a handful of people selling but the buyers are in hundreds. Fiji has plenty of land, we have a strong powerful people, the skills, the market and above all, Government’s assistance. Wake up youths and till the land, as food will be needed daily even after a million years.

According to FRCS, there are various types of tax incentives currently available for businesses engaging in the agricultural sector. It comprises of commercial agriculture and agro-processing, Small Micro Enterprises (SMEs) and Bio-Fuel Production Incentives.

Apart from being tax free, all items for agricultural purposes are granted duty free concessions. However, the respective tax incentive is subject to specific conditions. For commercial agriculture and agro-processing tax incentives, the income of the taxpayer shall be exempted only if the activity is a new activity, approved by FRCS and established from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2018.

The investment threshold and Income tax Holiday is as follows:

- For Small Micro Business Enterprises or SMEs, the income shall be exempted from income tax, if only the annual gross turnover or sales does not exceed \$500,000; and
- For Bio-Fuel production, the income for taxpayers shall be exempted for a period of ten consecutive fiscal tax years, only if the applicant engages in a new activity in a processing agriculture to communities into bio-fuel and it is approved by FRCS and established from 1st January, 2009 to 31st December, 2018. To qualify, the taxpayer must have a minimum capital investment of \$1 million and employ 20 or more local employees in each of the ten years.

Duty free on importation of agricultural items: There are duty exemptions available in the importation of plant, machinery and equipment for initial establishment of factories, chemical required for bio-fuel production and all our agricultural items. However, 9 percent import VAT will apply on importation of these items, which would be refunded to those who are registered for VAT purposes.

For commercial agriculture, Madam Speaker, and agro-processing and bio-fuel production incentives, the investor will have to make an application to FRCS to qualify for the incentive. The applications should include a comprehensive background of the projects such as the Director and the shareholders details, statements of assets and liabilities, locations and descriptions of the site of the projects, details of business activities, sketch plan of the projects, costing and financing details, completion dates, employment details, et cetera. For SME incentives, the investor can claim for exemption on the income tax returned for the fiscal tax year.

Exempt from stamp duties - SME Agriculture: The Honourable Minister for Economy had announced the waiver of stamp duty on all instruments or written documents for Small and Micro Enterprises effective from 1st January, 2016. Small and Micro Enterprises under Stamp Duties Act include any business with an annual gross turnover or sales not exceeding \$500,000. Therefore, all SMEs that are engaged in agricultural activities can qualify for the stamp duty waiver, provided that a bona fide registered business is tax and customs complying and provide a statutory declaration confirming that they have a gross turnover not exceeding \$500,000. Copies of financial statements must be attached where applicable. The policy intention for this incentive is to assist the SMEs. Post assessment audits will be conducted to verify declarations. Penalties will be imposed where taxpayers make false declarations or scheme to evade the tax.

Madam Speaker, all this morning, we have heard our Honourable Opposition Members complaining about the letter 'R' in the Budget Estimates. The 'R' depends on how they interpret. However, my interpretation on the 3Rs for the Agriculture Sector is Research, Review and Reduce input to increase output.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, once again, I urge all Fijians to get involved in agriculture and keep your family smiling. I support the Budget, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Minister for Forests to have the floor.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister; Cabinet colleagues; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; Members of the August House; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen. Madam Speaker, as alluded by my Honourable colleagues, I rise to affirm my Ministry's support of the 2018-2019 Budget that was presented by the Honourable Minister for Economy on 28th June, 2018.

Madam Speaker, before I deliver my 2018-2019 Budget Statement, I wish to clarify a point of issue raised earlier by Honourable Member, Semesa Karavaki. The Honourable Member was referring to a Government owned skidder which my Ministry has been using for training and certifying skidder operators for the past 30 plus years.

Madam Speaker, this skidder was sent to Lakeba four months ago and not over a year ago as referred to by the Honourable Member. The reason the skidder was sent across earlier was because transportation was available then.

We are in the process, Madam Speaker, of getting documentation in place for the loan of the skidder since Government is accountable for their assets and we need to ensure that any arrangements made for lending Government assets needs to comply with Government's Asset Policy to ensure accountability and transparency.

As for the operators, Madam Speaker, it is our responsibility to ensure duty care of civil servants sent across to assist communities for more than a month. We need to ensure their safety and wellbeing and for that we need to put in place measures that address these in their contractual arrangements through Human Resources Policy. This is a first for us and we need to do it right so such future arrangements are done with ease.

For the information of this august House, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has allocated a \$300,000 Budget for Lakeba for Capital Purchase of machines to assist them with

harvesting of pine and will continue to provide them assistance in the next few years to ensure they are self-sufficient.

Madam Speaker, I wish to applaud the Government and all hardworking public employees within central and line agencies, specifically the Ministry of Economy, for the presentation of an exceptional Budget, which is truly a people's Budget that promotes the two foundational approaches of the National Development Plan, that is Inclusive Socio-Economic Development and Transformational Strategic thrusts.

The heart of this 2018-2019 National Budget is that, it prioritises our national needs and focuses on the well-being of all Fijian families, because for this Government, all Fijian families matter. This Budget speaks of stability, reliability, security and inclusivity which are some of the key principles envisioned and evident in the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister and the FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry looks after one of the key natural resource sectors that helps to grow our economy, building and expanding it for future generations. Our natural forest resources enhance rural livelihoods while holding sentimental value to the people of Fiji in providing vital clean air and water and related environmental services including carbon sinks.

Madam Speaker, having recognised the importance of the forest sector, this Government has rightfully allocated sufficient budget to help my Ministry manage and address the needs of the sector reflecting the dreams, aspirations and expectations of the Fijian people.

I wish to thank the Government, Madam Speaker, for the generous budget allocation for the Ministry of Forests which will ensure maintainable growth and management of this important natural resource and allow us to drive this Government's vision of transforming Fiji towards a more progressive, vibrant and inclusive society.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry's initiatives contribute directly and indirectly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, specifically, SDG 15 - Life on Land; SDG 13 - Climate Action; SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy; SDG 14 - Life Below Water. These SDGs are further addressed in Fiji's National Development Plan and the Ministry has derived a Strategic Development Plan that addresses these international and national commitments and their implementation.

Fiji's forestry sector, Madam Speaker, is at a crucial point in its development, capitalising on new opportunities and addressing emerging challenges and risks relating to the natural disasters as we had experienced during the recent tropical cyclones. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Forests also supports national climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives which were championed through our COP23 Presidency, led by our Honourable Prime Minister. This Budget, Madam Speaker, will ensure that the forestry sector remains internationally competitive and nationally maintainable, supporting the keynote measures delivered at the COP23 to "Walk the Talk" through our forest sector's initiatives.

Please allow me, Madam Speaker, to present a synopsis of the Ministry's Annual Portfolio Budget Statement providing information to Parliament on the Ministry's proposed allocation of resources for the new financial year and how these key initiatives and programmes contribute to the Fijian Government's priorities.

The Ministry of Forests has been allocated a total budget of \$17.1 million for the next fiscal year of which, \$12.6 million is for Operating Expenses and \$3.8 million is allocated for Capital Expenditure. This, Madam Speaker, is an increase of \$1 million from the current budget allocation.

This budget, Madam Speaker, will solidly underpin the Ministry's mandate and provide the secure platform upon which we can continue to build the forest segment economy while adapting to the realities of climate change and its impacts. It further enables us to take pro-active measures to protect Fijian families, our forest assets and our division's economic future from climate induced threats.

Through the 2018-2019 Budget initiatives and key activities for my Ministry, community-based forest plantations will continue to receive support from the Government through the Fiji Pine Trust with an operating grant of \$0.7 million. This is an increase of \$0.2 million when compared to the 2017-2018 Fiji Pine Trust grant of \$0.5 million.

The Trust assists community landowners by the establishment of nurseries, nurturing and distribution of pine seedlings, supervision in plantation establishment, harvesting and processing, and restoration of harvested area. This budget will support the development of livelihood opportunities in rural and maritime areas, uplifting families and their standards of living.

A total of \$0.7 million will be allocated for the Reforestation of Degraded Forests (RDF) Programme which is an increase of \$0.2 million when compared to the 2017-2018 Budget allocation of \$0.5 million. This budget allocation, Madam Speaker, will allow the Ministry to continue and indeed increase its replanting programmes, targeting vulnerable and degraded areas, thereby increasing Fiji's forest cover and mitigating climate change impacts. In the long run, this budget will support the enhancement of carbon stock, increasing carbon sinks and reducing emissions.

Madam Speaker, the Government will continue to support the establishment of Small and Medium Enterprises in the forestry sector. A total of \$50,000 is allocated to continue the provision of subsidy on the purchase on forest value adding machines to nurture new and emerging cottage industries. This budget will enable the Ministry to improve productivity of communities engaged in wood carving.

A total of \$0.4 million will be allocated as a co-funding by Government to maintain its commitment to Fiji's REDD-Plus Programme. Madam Speaker, this will complement the US\$2.5 million grant provided by the World Bank through the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility to prepare Fiji's REDD Readiness Programme until 2020 and the Emission Reduction Programme (ERP) from 2020 to 2024. This programme contributes towards Fiji's readiness for future carbon trading.

The Reforestation of Indigenous Species Programme will receive \$0.25 million. Madam Speaker, this initiative was introduced in the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year, enabling the construction of an Indigenous Species Nursery at Vunimaqo Station in the province of Serua. This 2018-2019 Budget allocation will ensure that the Ministry continues to produce tree species that are endemic to Fiji and enable the general public to purchase seedlings of their choice.

The Silviculture Research Division at Colo-i-Suva has been allocated a budget of \$0.1 million to enhance their research capacity and competencies to build the foundation for the development of a seed bank, a first of its kind in Fiji. The seed bank will ensure that biodiversity is upheld and seeds remain viable for the future to support replanting programmes.

The Timber Utilisation & Research Division in Nasinu has been allocated \$0.14 million to procure wood analysis laboratory equipment. Madam Speaker, this will enable the sound and

accurate analysis of treated timber produced by sawmills. This will ensure compliance and quality assurance to the timber preservative regulation and required standards. Training for saw millers and timber processing workers is also a part of this budget after the need for it was identified during consultations with the industry.

Madam Speaker, \$0.37 million is allocated to the Utilisation of Wood Programme, which is an increase of \$17,500 when compared to the \$0.35 million allocation last year. This programme ensures the optimum utilisation of forest products and promotion of wood waste as an alternative source of raw materials through the establishment of small cottage industries.

A total of \$0.45 million is allocated for upgrading of forestry offices and staff quarters, which is an increase of \$0.1 million when compared to the \$0.32 million allocation for 2017-2018 allocation.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has 24 stations and 85 institutional quarters across Fiji and this budget will ensure the regular maintenance and upgrading of these assets and enhance the level of service delivery and extension support by all officers. It is our obligation as part of the duty of care for our officers and their families.

Madam Speaker, \$1.2 million is allocated to capital purchases of forestry harvesting and processing machines. This will support our Maritime Pine Schemes in the utilisation of pine resources for building improved housing, leveraging opportunities for income generation and elevating living standards of our maritime communities.

Madam Speaker, other major forestry programmes include:

- Monitoring.
- Compliance & Surveillance of forest harvesting practices.
- Research and Development of Wood and Non-Wood species to identify potential uses of lesser known species.
- Sandalwood Development Programme to revive the sandalwood industry.
- Upgrading of Colo-i-Suva Forest Park which attracts more visitors every year, with a total budget allocation of \$0.55 million.

This budget will support compliance to the Fiji Forest Harvesting Code of Practice (FFHCOP), exploring the potential of lesser known timber species and non-wood forest products and increasing revenue generated from our Forest Parks.

Madam Speaker, this 2018-2019 Budget provision for my Ministry will support both our existing and new initiatives. The new programmes are mostly on research and development to modernise and improve the way we sustainably manage and leverage our forest resources. The continuous commitment by the Honourable Prime Minister through bilateral and multilateral agreements will strengthen our sector's engagement at international level.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, my Ministry will continue to advocate Sustainable Forest Management and practices in an inclusive way with equal opportunities for gender, race and vulnerable members of the population.

Madam Speaker, this Government has clearly demonstrated its leadership, vision and total commitment when it comes to fighting for the sustainability of our resources into the future. We have a responsibility to the future generation to protect the long-term viability of our forests. The

importance of forests cannot be underestimated, yet despite our dependence on forests across the world, they continue to disappear.

Through this budget, my Ministry and I will stand together with the community to build a stronger, more resilient forest sector that is better able to withstand social, economic and environmental challenges. We have been allocated the funding to support economic growth through effective forest management and we intend to work hand in hand with our stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Budget to the House, a Budget that will enable my Ministry to better serve the people of Fiji through its mandate to promote and ensure sustainable forests.

We look forward to a successful 2018 – 2019 fiscal year for the forestry sector and the nation as a whole. *Vinaka vakalevu* and thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to have the floor.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for the preparation of 2018-2019 Budget that was tabled in this Parliament on Thursday, 28th June, 2018. In support of my Minister, I will focus my contribution on my Ministry's budget allocation for the Department of Water and Sewerage, Department of Work, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, Government Shipping Services and the Department of Transport & Planning.

Madam Speaker, Government has set an ambitious target in our National Development Plan to achieve 100 percent of Fiji's urban population having access to clean and safe water by 2021 and the rural and maritime area by 2031. As of 2017, 78 percent of Fiji's population will be accessible to clean drinking water and 25 percent to sanitation. Our target is aligned to Goal 6 of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) including the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Water and Sewerage is responsible for the formulating of policies and regulatory framework for the provision of sustainable water and wastewater services. The Department is a focal Government agency that monitors rural water and may provide technical recommendations to the Water Authority of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, while there is a need to achieve this target, one must also consider the sustainable management of this infinite resources. In this regard, \$185,296 has been allocated to continue with this establishment of national water statistics database. This is to centralise all vital water resource information currently held with individual key stakeholders into one database.

Madam Speaker, the Department also carries out data collection and verification of all our rural communities checking on water and sanitation services in this community. It also works on research and development of low cost and user friendly technologies for water and waste water treatment system for implementation of rural community.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Water and Sewerage will continue to work towards improving the livelihood of all Fijians within the water and sanitation sector. Furthermore, we will foster and maintain partnership programme with all our stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, Government through the Department of Works is responsible for the provision of professional advice, technical services, construction of works, supply, monitor, maintain and service plants, vehicles and other mechanical appliance and offer inclusive electrical engineering

services. To undertake routine and special maintenance work, Government has allocated \$1.5 million for public building and sewer aligning upgrading programme across the three divisions.

Madam Speaker, Government through the Department is also responsible for the provision of electricity supply to 1,220 customers in our four rural government stations, namely:

- | | | | |
|----|-----------|---|----------|
| 1. | Kadavu | - | 348; |
| 2. | Lakeba | - | 266; |
| 3. | Nabouwalu | - | 426; and |
| 4. | Rotuma | - | 180. |

These include the daily operations of these power stations and attending to breakdowns. The construction of the Rotuma Power House is allocated an amount of \$296,710 and upgrading of reticulation line at Lakeba Government Station with an allocation amount of \$182,716.

Madam Speaker, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) regulates maritime safety and ensures the protection of our marine environment in terms of transport. A budget of \$3.8 million has been allocated to facilitate this national obligation.

For the information of this august House, as of 2017 MSAF is responsible for registration of 1,831 boat masters, 703 Master Engineers Class 6, Registration of 401 ships and Assurance Certificates to 2,022 seamen.

The MSAF has re-engaged with the Fiji Maritime Academy to increase the number of courses provided for enrolment by 100 percent as well as the approval to commence the Diploma Programme. This has been supported with an operating grant of \$3.5 million to cater for their daily operations. Furthermore, in order to ensure physical presence of our outer station, MSAF has been allocated a capital grant of \$300,000 for the upgrading of MSAF officers in Natovi and a construction of a new office at Pacific Harbour.

In addition, the integration of counter clerk throughout all MSAF Office will ensure a more customer focus services with overall focus in a quick turnaround of service in particular in seafarers and ship documentation. The provision of MSAF's service at key domestic port has enabled transport connectivity through the movement of people and cargo at this 12 ports with an average per month of 121,000 passengers and 1,100 tonnes of cargo.

The two statistics above have an increase of 50 percent, Madam Speaker, during the peak period which are school holidays, Easter weekend and, of course, Christmas break. MSAF ensures a continuity of safe shipping through this periodical survey and are replacement of Enforcement officers at this key domestic ports. Furthermore, MSAF ensures the safe navigations of international and domestic shipping through the provision of a network of aid to navigation, including hazards within the shipping group. In doing so, the Authority maintains 87 light houses and a total of 1,200 beacons.

Madam Speaker, despite the normal responsibilities of regulatory authority, MSAF is embarking on a recruitment drive, both locally and internationally. This is to enhance the human resource capacity to ensure an improved professional delivery of service.

Madam Speaker, connectivity to our maritime community is an important service to enhance accessibility, a total budget of \$20 million has been allocated to Government Shipping Services. As a demonstration of Fiji's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goal and our leadership in COP 23, we will invest \$3 million in the construction of new NG Efficiency vessel which will

feature low carbon technology. This is also part of Government's fleet replacement strategy and our pathway to reduce the carbon emission of greenhouse gases in our maritime sector.

Madam Speaker, the vessel proposal powered generation and refrigeration equipment will be designed to also contribute to the objective of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to decarbonisation target of achieving at least 50 percent by 2050.

Furthermore, in recognition, that need to maintain to continue sustainable shipping services, Government has allocated \$800,000 for the upgrade of five vessels. This is to upgrade engine overhaul, purchase of mandatory equipment such as work boat, outboard engines, anchors and chains.

Madam Speaker, a million dollar investment in our re-fleeting and vessel upgrading programme also requires appropriate infrastructure. As we continue to increase the size of our fleet, and cater for large volume of cargo and passenger travel, it is prudent that we upgrade our age wharf facilities. For this purpose, a total of \$1.15 million has been allocated to complete the upgrading of the Government Wharf and \$3 million for the construction of the retaining walls.

Madam Speaker, Government is committed to ensuring safe, efficient and affordable transport service to all Fijians. For better planning and policy advice, \$107,000 has been allocated for the completion of Phase 2 of Household Travel Survey.

In ensuring the availability of reliable transport data and better planning and policy advice, \$107,000 has been allocated for the completion of phase 2 of the Household Travel Survey. The scope of work of Phase 2 target approximately 2,000 household which is equivalent to 8,000 respondent representing approximately one percent of the population of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the result of the survey will enable planners, analysts and even the industry to calibrate data and advise decision-makers to travel, have a pattern of passengers and flight movement and the construction of infrastructure and facilities, improvement and deployment of vehicles and ship including the impact of carbon emissions. Government has expressed the need for real modernising the existing rail network for the transportation of the passengers and cargoes.

The FijiFirst Government, in collaboration with the Government of India has secured railway infrastructure study. This is to improve connectivity between towns and cities, the upgrading railway system will bring about traffic relief.

The upgrading railway system will relief traffic congestion and also will be beneficial for the tourism sector. Madam Speaker, the government shipping franchise scheme allows private operators to provide subsidised training service to our remote islands deemed to be uneconomical. This scheme was designed to stimulate economic activity and encourage movement of passengers and cargo between our maritime island and main port of Fiji in Suva, Lautoka and Malau. The budgetary allocation of \$2.3 million has been provided to serve fourteen trips per month to nine identified uneconomical routes. The vessel operators are engaged through an open tender process to ensure transparency.

Madam Speaker, four vessel operators currently serve seven routes while Government Shipping Services (GSS) facilitates the remaining routes under namely the upper and lower Southern Lau, Northeast Vanua Levu, Yasawas, Rotuma, Yasayasa Moala, Kadavu, Lomaiviti and Northern Lau.

Madam Speaker, despite the challenge faced during the aftermath of *TC Winston* and the impact of *TC Josie* and *TC Keni* in April, 2018, service to the outer island continued as scheduled.

Government is adamant and will continue to provide this essential service to our maritime community.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, I congratulate the Honourable Minister for Economy and Honourable Prime Minister for giving a power-pack, comprehensive, a powerful and people's Budget which I, Madam Speaker, support, thank you, Madam.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon the Honourable Niko Nawaikula to take the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to start with the letter (R), to me it means that all the Honourable Ministers on the other side cannot be trusted. They cannot be trusted because 46 percent of all the money, expenditure of \$4 billion is centralised under the control of the power of one man, namely the Honourable Minister for Economy, and it means that every time you will have to put out your hands to him and borrow for money. All that you are responsible for are the Operational Budget so where does accountability come in? You might think that here we are approving this Budget for you, no. We are only approving it for you to go and borrow from him. In other words, what we are doing here is a waste of time because it does not authorise you to use this money.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Don't know.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It only authorises you to go and ask him and borrow from him.

Madam Speaker, on the Budget, I think I know that after four years of doing this Budget exercise, we have all become the wiser not to be fooled anymore because I think this is an exercise that fools us.

The gist of this Budget is a vote-buying exercise, in the same way that Homes-CARE is a vote-buying exercise; in the same way that agricultural assistance is a vote-buying exercise; in the same way that freebies but they are not freebies because we are automatically paying for it, a vote-buying exercise. You know I take my hand off Qorvis for clearly structuring all these for the one reason, it is in order that that side of the House remain in power so that it does not account to what it did in 2006. It does not want to account to the people for what it did in 2006 in removing a democratically elected government, as well as the perpetuated suppressing the rights of the indigenous people of this country, that is the whole exercise and the whole reason why you are all doing this because you are running away. Today, I can feel that you are all afraid of Mr. Rabuka.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Prime Minister is afraid because he sounds like a person that you are about to meet is Speight and you will. This is the time and I wish to stand on the record too to say that when we come in to power, this is for the record so that that side of the House as well as everyone out there hearing, we will restore the Great Council of Chiefs, remember that. We will remove the Land Use Decree, terminate the Surfing Decree.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are a lawyer.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is a Decree.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-That means Act.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We will terminate the Surfing Decree.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are a lawyer, it is a Land Use Act.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is a Decree.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a Land Use Act.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Act is passed in Parliament. This was never passed in Parliament.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You wish, you wish. We will take away every other law that suppress the rights of indigenous people of this country. And instead of the sunset clause, we will make the sun rise again for the indigenous people.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Remember that!

So, Madam Speaker, if you allow me to address some of the matters in relation to this. First, I would like to make some comments on the Independent Commissions. In any democracy, Madam Speaker, Independent Commissions are vital for democracies to survive and thrive, not so in Fiji. The Independent Commissions in Fiji are not independent and they should not be there. We should not be wasting our money supporting those Independent Commissions.

There are only independent on paper. For example, the Human Rights Anti-Discrimination is listed under the AG's Office while the Constitution Offices Commission is listed under the Prime Minister's Office. Electoral Commission, the Constitutional boundaries Commission, the Supervisor of Elections and FICAC are all listed under Department of Justice to come under the Attorney General.

The Accountability and Transparency Commission is a phantom, we do not know where it is. Where is it? Where is this Accountability and Transparency Commission?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member amongst all the other lies he just said, he said that the FICAC falls under the Ministry of Justice, it does not. Madam Speaker, if you have picked up the Budget Book, the Estimates, it is under Independent Commissions. Where does it say it falls under the Ministry of Justice? He has just said that. He is misleading Parliament. Completely misleading Parliament, withdraw it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not say it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You said it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not say it comes under that. You better read that, you better listen, because you do not listen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I did clarify because he did say that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not say that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...you said it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Taking record of this can be verified whether the statement was made or not before we continue. It was made?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You said it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will withdraw that unreservedly.

HON. SPEAKER.- I reckon if you withdraw.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw that unreservedly.

HON. SPEAKER.- I reckon if you withdraw with apology.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I apologise.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, taken.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I would just like to continue on my point of order. Honourable Nawaikula is notorious in Parliament for making comments and then saying he did not do it. He is actually just lied to you, Madam Speaker, for *Hansard* clearly indicates he actually did say that and he stood up and said: "I did not say it". We should do the Honourable thing in this House and actually if you make a mistake, if you do have said something maybe at in heat of the moment have the audacity or have the gumption and have the humility to actually admit it that you said it. That is the problem, Madam Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I do not know what is wrong with you. Sit down. Sit down and listen, please. You are too arrogant, that is the problem with you. Too young and too arrogant.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Member you have withdrawn the statement?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes. I did.

HON. SPEAKER.- And you must....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, under the Parliamentary language, I cannot call Honourable Nawaikula a liar but I can say he is lying. He can say to me that he may think that I may have arrogance but he cannot call me arrogant. That is the Standing Orders as we have established, Madam Speaker. He continues to say that, I mean the problem with all of these people here is everything is very personalised.

But the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, if he wants to call me arrogant, he says I am too young, even though I may be 53 in a few months' time, the fact of the matter is that again, we are going down this path. And Honourable Nawaikula, maybe set some rules. I do not mind being called, he says "I am arrogant", I do not mind him calling me that, but if that is the rule then let us open the doors. Let us open the doors and we can make comments about them too, because we are going to go down the spiral if they want to continue with that kind of language.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have heard the statements made and you need to follow the rules.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, I think.

HON. SPEAKER.- You need to follow the rules.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I think he has taken it back. He is concerned that I called him arrogant. Well, you know I am sorry for that, if I hurt you. So, what do you want me to do?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You do not have to.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What do you want me to do?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We are having a conversation now and, Madam Speaker, all I am just saying if he wants to make those kinds of personal direct comments, then if we are allowing it, that is fine. They have to be prepared, they need to be prepared to actually take the same heat. That is the point I am making and then we are going on a downward spiral because people will be able to say anything they like against each individual Member. If they want that, let us have it. They want it, let us have it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I want it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please remember, I need to keep ...

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let us have it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You want it. Let us have it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yeah!

HON. SPEAKER.- I am asking, you need to uphold the integrity of this House and be very careful on the use of the words.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What are you doing?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I thought we were subject to who ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Please uphold the integrity of the House, respect of the House, and we will not have any more of that kind of language used. You may continue.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I was saying that the accountability of the Transparency Commission, Mr. Phantom, we do not know where is he and we do not know what he

is doing at this stage because I do not know where they are and what they have been doing. But Madam Speaker, if they do their job properly, then they should have already relayed the details of the salaries from 2009 to 2013 paid to the Ministers as well as to account for the millions used during that era. If they did these two things even I would vote for an increase in funding for them each year as long as I am made a Member of Parliament (MP). I am referring now to the Independent Commission.

Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) is listed as an independent body when we all know it is not. These Commissions do the Government's bidding mainly by flying minute. They do not act for the people at all and the \$78 million spent over the past two years and allocated for this current period for this institution is designed to protect the Government and prosecute its opponents, and the most unfortunate of course is the Human Rights Commission.

We all know what happened recently in Bau, when the Army were escorting a person, a citizen of this country depriving him of his liberty and where was the Director of Human Rights? Suddenly he lost his voice and he disappeared somewhere. He should have been the one. He should be the champion for human rights. So, where was he? You tell us. You, from the other side. Where was he? All the time you are holding the 2013 Constitution and you said, "2013 Constitution protects our rights." So, where was this person? You should know very well that a statement was given by the Police that they were not investigating. It would have been correct because the Police has the power to arrest if they were suspected of committing an offence. But they gave a statement to say they did not. They were only there to remove him. You should know. You should know that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You should know that, Honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Now, Madam Speaker, on housing. Madam Speaker, it is hard to speak about our housing needs without reflecting on what might we had, had the Honourable Prime Minister accepted the offer from the New Zealand Foreign Minister, Honourable Winston Peters that his Government would build and pay for all our housing needs to help eliminate this crises for Fiji. It would have cost the New Zealand Government hundreds of millions. The only thing that the Prime Minister had to do was not to overthrow the elected government of Prime Minister Qarase. Just think of it, Madam Speaker!

The \$670 million-plus we had spent on housing over the past 12 years could have been used for other projects for our people and more than 100,000 citizens would have been already housed by now and our Prime Minister, Honourable Bainimarama, would have been a national hero. But he turned it down and opted to overthrow an elected government and subjected tens of thousands of our people into remaining in substandard housing over the past 12 years.

We know this is Elections year, Madam Speaker and the housing budget jumps from the average of \$15.2 million a year for the past three years to \$41 million this year, which is a 171 percent increase. A major concern that I have, Madam Speaker, is that this housing allocation do not include village housing needs which must be corrected, otherwise this will be discriminatory, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make a comment on COP23. Madam Speaker, it is to be expected that the Honourable Attorney-General will speak in such glowing terms on COP 23 Chair, our Honourable Prime Minister. After all, this provides them with the great external issue to be able to redirect attention away from Fiji and all the while assessing the huge budgetary allocation for the COP 23 President, which I understand is about \$8 million. And this is in addition to the \$328,000 per annum we pay the Honourable Prime Minister, plus his \$3,000 a day allowance.

For someone who promised the nation in December 2006, that no military officer would benefit financially from this *coup*, there can be little doubt that he has become a multi-millionaire and when this Government finally has the courage to finally disclose the salaries that he received from 2009 to 2013, we will all be ready to know how many millions they have made. Madam Speaker...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, let me make some comments on sugar. The Honourable Minister of Economy said, "What is new in this budget is the setting up of a stabilisation price funded in partnership with the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) of \$85 a tonne, all cane payments for the next three years." He said that he already maintained cane payments of over \$82 a tonne for the last three years. He said Government is now going to be able to bring a solid level of stabilisation that is possible because of the tremendous effort of this Government to reduce the cost base for farmers and merchandise this industry.

Madam Speaker, when for some reason our Honourable Prime Minister became President of the International Sugar Organisation (ISO) delivered one of his best performances. In 2013, when he told the ISO that our industry had made what it termed as "a dramatic turnaround". Cane was better, the farmers were earning more and a manufacturer on ethanol was a grower. He said, "Some people said, "it could be done adding but we have done it." This was, Madam Speaker, you know clearly a hallucination; a Qorvis scripted *lasulasu*, then in 2015 for some reasons only he can explain, he was again claiming everything was good. He told us the industry could stand alone and did not need any more taxpayers' money, again hallucination - a Qorvis scripted *lasulasu*.

And again today another Qorvis spin happening all over in this year's Budget. The Honourable Minister for Economy referred to continuing efforts to modernise the industry to be more competitive. He said \$62.3 million has been set aside for this, then he indicated that the Government would be going into a partnership with the FSC to establish a stabilised price described in the budget documents as stabilisation fund. What he omitted to tell the House was that the FSC is on a life support, it is dead, courtesy of the taxpaying Fiji families because according to FSC's own 2017 Annual Reports, this is what the 2017 Annual Reports said on FSC.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible)

FSC cannot pay its debts. There was no.....

Madam Speaker, that is unparliamentary!

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, is he allowed to do that?

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Member, I am not a "you" here! I am not a "you".

HON. SPEAKER.- All right, that door was opened, now I want that closed.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then you are a liar!

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Bring it on my friend.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There was no specific mention of this in the report by the FSC Chairman, Mr. Vishnu Mohan, a former ANZ Executive. Incidentally, Madam Speaker, can the Minister for Sugar confirm or otherwise that Mr. Mohan actually lives in Canada and has to travel to Suva for board meetings? If so, at what cost the Fijian family taxpayers, does he travel business class, and who pays?

Madam Speaker, the report of the Independent Auditor says, and I quote “the Corporation is not making enough money to meet its commitments and obligations when they fall due”. Simply put, Madam Speaker, the FSC is insolvent, it is dead.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is what the Auditor said, I am only saying it here. If you argue with the Auditor, that is strange.

In the Report, Sir, Note 21, the Auditor said that FSC had been incurring significant losses. In the year to 31st May, 2017, it had made a net loss before income tax of \$45 million. The Corporation had debt repayment commitments of \$89 million in the financial year to 31st May, 2017.

Furthermore, the Corporation needed further money for its working capital, used to keep the Corporation going and paying for its capital expenditure. The funds needed to finance this project and to cover its operating losses. Again, the Audit Report also says and I quote, “the above conditions and other matters as disclosed in Note 21 of the Financial Statement indicate the existence of a material uncertainty that cast significant doubt about the Corporation’s ability to continue as a going concern.”

Herein, Madam Speaker, lies the real truth about FSC and the punch line, the auditor states that, “given the financial position, the debt of FSC and recurring losses, the Corporation would not be able to continue and is a growing concern without Government’s support.” They go on to say that the Government is committed to provide the assistance to bring about required reforms and improvements. We are still propping up the FSC which without doubt is a casualty of 12 years of incompetence by the Bainimarama-led Government. If it falls over, the ordinary taxpayers will have to pay the hundreds of millions that the FSC owes.

This also means, Madam Speaker, that they have also failed to live up to Section 4 of their own party’s constitution which says, “We operate with a long term horizon”. No problem in removing that, it may only be evident in the future. We can see ahead to guide Fijians along the best way forward. Now, you apply that to FSC and what can you say?

Obviously, Madam Speaker, they cannot see ahead, taking FSC as an example and they can no longer blame the previous governments for the dreadful state of the FSC as they always do because they are now the previous government.

Note 21 also states that loans from the Government valued at more than \$173 million had been converted into a 30-year loan. I ask now, what is the amount that the Minister for Economy estimates in taxpayers will have to pump into the new Sugar Stabilisation Fund? Can you tell us what the targets are for the 5-year plan? Note 21 does confirm that the Directors of FSC believe the

Corporation would be able to meet liabilities as and when they fall due, but the detailed planning and data, this belief is founded on its Annual Report to the Minister made this also available to us.

Madam Speaker, who is going to step in and accept responsibility for the mess the FSC is in today? Will it be the Prime Minister? Will it be the Minister for Sugar or will it be the Canada Remote Controlling Chairman? One on the board of FSC is Mr. Arif Ali, Governor of the Reserve Bank is listed as being appointed Director from January 2017. The Reserve Bank, Madam Speaker, is supposed to be independent and so is Mr. Ali. Why is he on the FSC Board which is allied with the current Government?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is very significant that in July 2015, Mr. Ali was quoted in the media report as saying, “the sugar industry was no longer a significant part of the economy.” He said that the country could not rely on the industry anymore.

Allow me now, Madam Speaker, to see to other matters. On *iTaukei* development of the land. Madam Speaker, inclusive of the 2018-2019 Estimates, the Sugar Industry would have received \$244.8 million in funding, \$173 million in loans and \$322 million in Government guarantees; that is \$739.8 million.

In contrast, Madam Speaker, the landowners of 87 percent of the land in Fiji were promised \$10 million a year by this Government in 2015 for the development of their land had only received about \$503,000 with the revised estimate for 2017-2018 of \$10 million.

Madam Speaker, it is four years now the FijiFirst Government launched its *iTaukei* Development Fund as its top priority in 2015. Madam Speaker, we know that through Qorvis, this Government will use every single advantage available to maximise publicity but in comparison there is really nothing there, you cannot compare. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. Parliament will now adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.30 p.m.