

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 18TH JUNE, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 18TH JUNE, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.33 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 17th June, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 17th June, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I welcome the members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and the internet and those listening to the radio. Thank you for taking an interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Breach of Standing Orders

Honourable Members, it has come to my attention that some Members are breaching Standing Orders 28, whereby Members must address the Speaker in the English language. In the same vein, Members are abusing the parliamentary process and I will be more vigilant on this issue. I remind all honourable Members that the Standing Orders is very clear and it states that a Member must address the Speaker in the English language, therefore, I will expect nothing less from all honourable Members. If you do use a Fijian expression or another expression in another language, please interpret it. I would like to know the meaning as well because sometimes what is the correct meaning and what is a swear word is very touchy. You know that as well as I do. So let us continue with the debate, but those are what I ask of you.

Housekeeping Matters

On some housekeeping matters, it has also come to my attention that Members mobile phones are ringing loud during the proceedings, and Members are also watching recorded footage but on a loud mode. I can hear it from here. Honourable Members, there must be some form of decorum in this august House. Therefore, I remind honourable Members to put phones on silent mode and also refrain from watching videos or footages during the proceedings. I know some of them are very entertaining, and I would like to share it with you, but I am sitting up here.

Honourable Members, there has been a question regarding the adjustment of Members' microphones. Now, there is no such apparatus with the Speaker that I can adjust the tone of microphone on this side of the House or the microphone on the other side of the House. In some Parliaments, like the Parliament of the country where I have just been to in the last month, Mongolia, the Speaker has the control. If a Member's time is up he gives the warning, and when two minutes is over and the delegate still proceeds, he cuts him off automatically. We do not have that here, and I do not have the ability to adjust any microphones. This is what has come from the Professional Electronics Limited, with reference to the above that is microphone variations inside Parliament of the Fiji Chambers. With reference to the above, please be advised that the delegate microphones are all set at the same level and are routed digitally through a single control. Therefore, it is not possible to obtain a clear signal from one side of the room and not the other. The system, however, allows the adjusting of individual microphones sensitivities but this has all been set to default since the installation and commissioning in 2014. The only variation to speak quality may come about by delegates not speaking directly into the microphone or the different voice tones of delegates.

Now some of you have very lovely voice tones and I appreciate. Others well..

(Laughter)

So use the mike properly.

Hon. M.R. Vuniwaqa and Hon. S.V. Radrodro - Birthday Wishes

Honourable Members, before we proceed to the next item on the Order Paper, I take this opportunity to wish the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, the honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, one and the honourable Salote Radrodro, a very happy birthday to you both, and many happy returns of the day.

(Acclamation)

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Bills for Consideration today.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON 2019-2020 APPROPRIATION BILL 2019

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off on the Batting list last night. I now call on the honourable Jese Saukuru, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation Bill 2019-2020. First allow me to comment on the honourable Attorney-General's remarks on SODELPA's Pre-Budget Analysis, by sharing what Mr. Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher said and I quote:

“All truth passes through three stages:

1. It is ridiculed;
2. It is violently opposed; and
3. It is accepted as self-evident.”

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Attorney-General may ridicule the truth, he may oppose it, in the end, the truth will prevail and he must accept it. The reduction in the Budget alone had sent shockwaves to every ordinary Fijian and business people alike in Fiji and abroad. Your very action speaks louder than words. From their viewpoint, why the reduction in Budget when you are promoting the Bainimarama Boom. Now, the question is “Boom for whom?” The two diametrically opposed school of thoughts presented by the honourable Attorney-General and the honourable Leader of the Opposition coupled with the opinions expressed about this Budget from key stakeholders should be sufficient to trigger healthy debate. Sir, my speech should be confined to rural maritime development as well as on disaster management.

As a new Member of Parliament, I had a lot of expectations from the honourable Minister for Economy and this Government to provide the necessary remedy to our ailing national economy, but that was not to be. Instead, Sir, it was a pity, a poor show and a sham to sit here for almost three hours out of which the honourable Minister for Economy took a quarter of that time demonising and blaming the past Governments, their leadership, policies and programmes for our current economic mess.

Least, he needs to be reminded of a few things which I sum as follows:

1. That the military *coup* of 2006 qualified them to be where they are today;

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir:

2. That they cannot hide their sins and omissions now having been in power for over a decade;
3. That their time to deploy politics of diversion and excel in politics of connivance is over;
4. That the people of Fiji can see the true colours of this Government through its transparent ruse;
and
5. That you can fool some people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

In sum total, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget is an insult to the intelligence of the people of Fiji and an act of betrayal by this Government upon its own voters. This Budget makes a mockery of the new albeit truncated mandate secured by this Government, and is paving the way forward to an unprecedented socio-economic and geopolitical disaster in the making which will render this nation and its people bankrupt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Economy excelled to talk about the NBF crisis. He said everything except failed to acknowledge that it was an economic disaster which we managed by owning up our failures and mitigating by recovery, which provided the then budding politicians and now trumpeters of this dictatorship their employment in Fiji.

While talking of the NBF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Economy should have also talked about how and why did Fiji lose out on the 350 million Euros from the European Union for the Alternative Livelihood Program, and another close to \$200 million from New Zealand to resettle our squatter dwellers? Someone has said well you do not throw stones to people on the streets when you live in a glass house.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the glass house has become so muddy and messy after its attempted to clean up following the carnage of democracy in 2006 that it needs a boom powder wash and that is the only right place for the word boom fits into this Budget. Otherwise, a whitewash or hogwash are other relevant terminologies that one can use to hang this Budget up for public probity and skin the cat to the bone.

Sir, the honourable Minister for Economy may not have increased taxes except the plastic levy but the fact is, there are no increase in the budgetary allocation for key Government departments. This includes the economic sectors upon which the development and growth of our economy largely depends. I wonder the basis of his claim, our GDP will grow to be over \$12 Million. I see it as a hot air balloon looking nice but about to explode any moment because the gas and the time are running out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what that \$1 billion Budget cut means? Let us examine the same and what it means to ordinary Fijians:

- The quality and accessibility to Government services would be compromised;
- The key tenets of income redistribution will be made a farce;
- Election promises made by this Government would continue to be pie in the sky;
- Reduced emoluments would mean job cuts or pay cuts or no new jobs in the Government;
- Less allocation for capital expenditure would mean less development for Fiji;
- A quarter of the Budget placed under “R” means they may never see the light of day given the limited scope of revenue generation;
- The lives of those dependent on freebies would become miserable;
- The time for partying with public funds and populist stride of this Government is now over; and

- Finally, the chickens have come home under the recommendations and pressure of the IMF Report to downsize their spending at a spiralling cost to our national interest.

It sums up, what life is when you tend to live beyond your means and choose extravaganza over pragmatic approach to leadership and financial management.

In respect of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, there is an increase of capital expenditure from \$4.2 million to \$7.7 million. While welcoming the aspect of this Budget, let me express the hope that the long and outstanding community projects proposals by the Provincial and Advisory Councils will be implemented and that there would be more council meetings to facilitate development at the grassroots level. For the information of the House, the resolutions of Tikina Council Meetings are hardly actioned by Government Ministries.

The poverty of access affecting our people in the rural and maritime zones have resulted into situation of urban influx and this is clearly reflected in the last National Census Report. People want to have jobs, access to services apart from suffering the mood of resignation from primary industries.

Sir, the lack of development in terms of not only infrastructure but capital injection or investment, revival of existing industries and inability to establish new industries has resulted in this demographic shift. It is apparent that apart from the failure of the concept of Green Economy, the paucity of credit facilities to our rural people has resulted in this mass movement.

As more people move to the urban areas, the quality of services to those still in the rural and maritime zone has been compromised. This includes public transportation, shipping services, closure of schools and enterprises, and decline in the number of cultivators and labourers available for cultivation. People cannot afford to be suffering due to no fault of their own when the Government cannot take care of simple things, like water, electricity, drains, peace and order, job creation and roading.

Having stated that, Mr. Speaker Sir, let me outline what is needed to withhold people, repose their faith and empower them in the rural and maritime areas. The key elements of this goal can be summarised as follows.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Basic infrastructure development; people in the rural and maritime areas do not need all that pie in the sky, hallow promises of state-of-the-art road or shipping services. They simply need good roads free from potholes, and shipping services which are safe, regular and affordable.

Travel and communications is an important part of national development and human progress. It is rather unfortunate that despite exorbitant sums of money poured in communications and infrastructure, these basic services continue to be proof of quality and depleting in standards by each passing day.

Access to social services; free medicine scheme, free education and other handouts have not resolved the issues of access to social services, such as the distance to health centres and schools. Instead, poor road conditions and irregular services resulted in more travel time and costs.

Permits and licences; we have heard enough mention in this House on the need to have a one stop shop or app for processing of permits and licences for development purposes and business. People in the rural and maritime zone cannot afford to spend weeks running for that, spending money, and in several cases seeking and obtaining professional advice. This is taxing the rural dwellers and withholding business development, as well as construction in rural and remote areas.

Sir, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Meteorological Services also received an increase of \$2.5 million, which we welcome. There are several issues ranging from weather news reporting to disaster preparedness which needs to be examined and perhaps, upgraded, given the lingering threat of climate change to the Fiji Islands and other Pacific Islands.

The effects of climate change resulting in off-season and adverse weather patterns, as well as the failure of the Government to maintain our rivers and streams, drainage systems and water outlets, have resulted in more damages than ever to life and property, farm produce and livestock.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Our Parliament and the people of Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, still need to be updated with the Audited Reports of the *TC Winston* and COP 23 accounts.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, allow me to talk about climate change from a different perspective. In the words of Mr. Vaclav Klaus, a Czech economist and politician, who served as the first Prime Minister and second President of the newly independent Czech Republic said, and I quote:

“Nevertheless, there is another threat on the horizon. I see this threat in environmentalism which is becoming a new dominant ideology, if not a religion. Its main weapon is raising the alarm and predicting the human life endangering climate change based on man-made global warming.”

Sir, my bible does, indeed, talk about climate change. It is our spiritual blindness, greed and willing ignorance that are at the root of confusing the clear and irrefutable science on climate.

Lest we forget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last known act of cannibalism in Fiji only occurred in 1867 whereby the Methodist Missionary, Reverend Thomas Baker, along with six other Fijian student teachers, were murdered and eaten in central Viti Levu.

However, as Christianity spread, Fijians began to turn away this practice and to worship the Christian God, not the old Fijian gods. Storms, floods, et cetera, appear as biblical end time symbols, for the root of the problem is man’s alienation from God.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you remove God, all Government policies and activities are doomed, and we have all witnessed these firsthand, as follows:

1. The FijiFirst Government on record is the only Government facing the most natural disasters.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.-

2. Within 10 minutes on 20th February, 2016, *TC Winston* sustained winds of 280 kilometres per hour, and the pressure of 884 hectopascal that cost us dearly in damage amounting to \$2.98 billion and 40 percent of Fiji's population affected.
3. A lot of people and communities are still left behind after *TC Winston*.
(Chorus of interjections)
4. Fiji's crime rate continues to rise exponentially, especially violence against women and children.
5. There is declining growth in all our resource sectors of the economy.
6. FijiFirst's indirect tax through licensing hurts the people.
7. Fiji is much more racially divided now than before.
8. There is notable increase in urban drifts and unemployment.
9. FijiFirst's freebies only worsened poverty in Fiji.
10. FijiFirst's Fijian-Made initiatives had failed when they continued to recruit expatriates from overseas.
11. Public infrastructure continues to deteriorate.
12. Low morale in the Public Service because of job insecurity; and many more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pine industry lies very close to the heart of my Province. Firstly, allow me to pay tribute to the successive leaders, who were very instrumental in setting up the pine plantations and mooted the idea of gradually enabling landowners to assume the ownership of the pine industry in Fiji.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not the case anymore, as acquiring ownership of our pine plantations are a distant dream under this Government. Instead, what they are getting is lease security bonus, payments on the eve of Election and lip service. Their status has, in fact, been reduced from effective landowners and shareholders to mere observers in the pine industry, watching our perseverance, sacrifice and endurance going to a total waste.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, in the *Fiji Sun* on 3rd November, 2018, Rachna Lal reported, and I quote:

“Fiji Pine Group is forecasting record-breaking \$35 million operational profits in 2018”.

She further quoted:

“Group Executive Chairman, Faiz Khan, said if the company adds back, the record \$7 million paid to landowners for lease bonus, the 2018 operational profits is forecasted at a whopping \$42 million.”

With more than \$100 million profit achieved over the years, the Company had paid off most of its debts.

Sir, the landowners currently hold minority shares in the Fiji Pine Group of Companies through the Fiji Pine Trust with a dividend right. However, it is sad to note that landowners do not know that lease security bonus they are receiving is simply deducted from Company profits for the year as confirmed by the Executive Chairman.

To add salt to the wound, the FijiFirst Government is stopping landowners’ participation in business by discouraging them from exercising their dividend rights and the opportunity to invest by buying more of Government’s redeemable shares.

Sir, keeping our trust to our voters and being faithful advocates of the resource-owners and the original pledge that was made to them by the then Government, I regard it as our duty as the most loyal opposition to the people of Fiji, to announce here and now that the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) Government will seek to promote the interests and aspirations of the resource-owners in the forest sector, inclusive of pine and mahogany.

The next issue on which I intend to speak on very briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Sugar Industry upon which the lives of thousands of my constituents are dependent upon. They rely on the Industry for employment, lease monies, enterprise, cultivation, as well as activities associated with the products of sugar.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Although its contribution to GDP has declined from 16 percent in 1995 to 6 percent in 2016, thousands of people still depend on sugar as their main source of income and livelihood. The policy of SODELPA will be agriculture for the sugar sector is guided by the ideal of supporting food security and foreign exchange earnings.

While this Government is on the record harping about insurance of 99-year land leases, recorded investments in the Sugar Industry and paying a high cane price, what it fails to explain is the mass exodus of more than 7,500 cane growers from the Sugar Industry in the last one decade alone under their rule. As if it was not enough and as opposed to the announcement of harvesting a bumper crop, cane production has reached an all-time low.

The rationale used by them as a measure of self-vindication, as opposed to the ground reality, simply does not tie up, but contradicts each other more apparently than ever before. Is it because the Sugar Industry reforms have gone wrong? Is it because the democratic institutions and structures in the Sugar Industry were taken away, oppressing the voice of the cane growers? Is it because of misplaced priorities? What is it? What is the case?

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that this Government has spared no stone in stoning the Sugar Industry from its sick bed to the death bed, and that includes the loss of €350 million for the Alternative Livelihood Programme, lost by way of the *coup* in 2006...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- ...and the regime's refusal to return Fiji to democratic rule.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is that charity begins at home. There is no point in preaching the Talanoa Concept overseas when this Government cannot have the *talanoa* with us and the key stakeholders upon matters affecting the Sugar Industry.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to record my strong opposition to this Budget. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute and support other honourable Members in congratulating the honourable Minister for Economy for a well-thought and articulated 2019–2020 National Budget.

The theme, “To Secure our Nation a Sustainable Future”, sets the direction for Government to implement the right policies and strategies to achieve the maximum output for this financial year.

Let me respond to honourable Saukuru. Mr. Speaker, the 2006 *coup* brought true democracy to this nation.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, do not forget about the 1987 *coup*. That has bought chaos to this nation.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- And the very person who did that is sitting here in this august House, your Leader, Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- He has brought chaos to this nation. The sufferings and the pain our people have gone through in this nation is because of him.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- The amount of money we are putting into the Sugar Industry, the agriculture sector, the people in the squatters is because of him.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- The amount of money we are putting in Health Sector, the NCDs, is because of him, because people will enjoy and working hard in their farms.

We never used to hear about NCDs before. They were in the farm working hard, but all because of him.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Do not forget about the *coup* of 1987, Honourable Saukuru.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, I am sitting here, not over there.

(Laughter)

HON. V. PILLAY.- That is the fact, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We cannot forget the *coup* of 1987, which was done by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

The chaos brought to this nation, the pain and suffering of our people is just because of him. The amount of extra dollars that is being put to get the sugar industry, the agriculture sector and the people in our squatters is because of him.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we could possibly be swallowing at credit card's weight in plastic every week. So infers a recent study. Globally, we are ingesting an average of 5 grams of plastic every week, the equivalent of a credit card; recent studies conducted by the University of Newcastle indicates that:

- a. People consume an average of 5 grams of plastic every week, says new research;
- b. The largest sources of plastic ingestion is drinking water, according to researchers;
- c. There is growing concern about plastic's health risks.

Mr. Speaker, this deadly plastic contamination finds its origin from micro-plastics, that is, minute particles smaller than five millimetres. These particles find their way into our food, our drinking water and sadly even the air we breathe. It believed that around the world, people ingest an average of around 2,000 micro-plastic particles every week.

Mr. Speaker, the origins of these small particles are from larger plastics that are broken down when they are disposed improperly and exposed to the natural elements. They then find their way into our rivers and oceans and get eaten by fish and other marine animals. This then ends up on our plates coming up as part of the food chain.

Mr. Speaker, this global issue is so unabated that even if Fiji were to clean its own backyard, it still would not keep us safe entirely from these particles as these particles could also be coming to our shores from international waters.

Mr. Speaker, Fiji is joining a growing club of countries that are taking steps to ban Expandable Polystyrene Foam (EPS) or styrofoam - a petroleum-based plastic. While this is a material of great concern to our environment, it is also quite appealing to use in so many ways. Products made of this material are a real threat and a danger to our environment and should have no place in Fiji. They are major environmental hazard where they leak into our marine environment and contaminate our waters.

Mr. Speaker, studies conducted by the University of California show that our marine animals are threatened with both mechanical and chemical threats. The polystyrene foam (when swallowed by our fish) lodges itself in the intestines and causes blockages that can be highly lethal.

Mr. Speaker, chemically absorbent properties make styrofoam even more dangerous. They behave like pollutant sponges, absorbing and concentrating some of the most dangerous pollutants in the ocean. The marine animals, some of whom are found on our delicacy menu consume them and end up on our plates.

Recent studies show that there are 57 chemical by-products released during the formation of styrofoam. These are not just air pollutants but also result in liquid and solid toxic waste materials requiring proper means of disposal. During the manufacturing process, styrofoam uses hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) which damages our ozone layer and impacts climate change which is a serious problem as well.

Mr. Speaker, another reason why banning of styrofoam is a necessity is the near impossibility of its recycling due to its chemical properties and even if it were possible, there is not a market for the same. With the overwhelming evidence and reasons presented to this august House over the dangers of plastics and styrofoam, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment strongly recommends the regulatory changes that will apply to all plastic bags which comprises in whole or in part, polyethylene with a thickness of less than 50 microns.

Mr. Speaker, today marks the next step in a long quest for innumerable committed champions of our environmental movement, local communities and our Government. Mr. Speaker, now is the time for us Fijians to take this bold step. This step that we take today clearly shows that as we the Government is not providing lip-service but are taking our obligations seriously to protect the environment for our future Fijian generations. Fijians wants action on the ground and the Government is stepping up to the occasion.

Agriculture: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocation of \$78.7 million to the Ministry of Agriculture indicates the significance of agriculture development in Fiji. The Government of the day understands that agriculture is essential for economic growth, development and poverty alleviation. Agriculture has also been regarded as the backbone and solution to economic prosperity. Mr. Speaker Sir, the various programmes to be implemented by the Ministry under this new Budget will contribute immensely to addressing those challenges that currently limits the abilities of our rural people to unlock their economic potential in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry through its various programmes offers assistance that can promote farmers from subsistence to semi-commercial and commercial level of agriculture. Crop and livestock commodity programme such as land clearing and preparation, farm access, farm house, soil testing kits, new research activities, sustainable land management and our links to stakeholders should enable the enhancement of farmers status. Successful implementation of this programmes also contributes to increase agriculture production for domestic food needs and exports.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I will briefly highlight some of the key areas that the Ministry will continue to work on in 2019 and 2020. Development of product standards and agronomic information: The Ministry has increased its efforts on improving products and agronomic standards for key crops. For example, the Fiji Kava Product Safety Code and the Quality Manuals are critical to lifting product standards and provide traceability.

Access to planting materials and seeds: The Ministry in collaboration with private sectors is improving efforts to increase supply of planting materials and seeds, researched and released climate resilient crops and strengthened its tissue-culture, breeding capacities including the regional and international partners to meet the growing demands by farmers. In 2018, the Ministry released two resilient varieties of taro and sweet potatoes namely *Tarova Vula* and *Tarova Loa* and the Golden Brown to increase production for markets and mitigate risks for farmers.

Organised Farmer Network and Clusters: The Ministry will continue to support commodity growth through organised commodity groups or clusters which are important to pooling resources, exchanging good practices and addressing market supply issues. Establishing these networks and clusters of farmers should enable the Ministry to efficiently allocate resources and deliver timely technical support.

Commercial Agriculture Development: The Ministry will develop value-chains, contract farming and engage youth in commercial agriculture, and to better link commercial farmers to the local tourism industry and export markets. Yet, to be competitive in domestic and international markets, Fiji's agriculture sector must be demand-led and value chains must effectively link farmers to input and output markets. Furthermore, commercial farmers must gain better access to modern technologies, large-scale land and investment which can increase output and returns to labour.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I will now elaborate further on various strategies that the Ministry will undertake for the Crop and Livestock sectors in order to utilise its 2019-2020 budgetary allocation.

Crop Sector: Mr. Speaker, given the high level of participation in the crops sector, increased crop production contributes to raising household incomes and improving farmer's livelihood. In addition, growth in the crop sector will lead to increased demand for goods and services that will generate revenue in secondary industries through input supply, marketing, finance, processing, food retail and tourism.

Cocoa: The Cocoa Rehabilitation Programme is allocated a budget of \$400,000 that will focus on restoring the existing cocoa plantations to meet the growing demand for organic cocoa and gourmet boutique chocolate. The scope of implementation will include setting up of farmers' association assistance to acquire bio-grow organic licenses, rehabilitation of the 120 hectares of existing cocoa farming areas in Namau, Matasawalevu, Colata and Navuniivi and planting the new variety of better cocoa yield.

Pineapple: Mr. Speaker Sir, Fiji's Pineapple Industry have been consistently performing well over the years. The average volume produced annually in the last five years amounted to 5,000 metric tonnes. Our main export markets for pineapple are New Zealand, Canada, Nauru and other Pacific Islands. The average pineapple export earnings for the five years is around \$10,000. On the other hand, the volume of imports continue to increase which is mainly due to the increase in demand from the tourism sector. This analysis warrants Government's intervention to increase pineapple production and improve quality to meet the demand of the tourism sector. This budget of \$100,000 will support pineapple farmers in the provision of agro-inputs, planting materials and farm implements.

Bilateral Quarantine Agreement (BQA): Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has 49 commodities under the BQA that has open access export to New Zealand. Fiji is the only country that can supply fresh *okra* and *duruka* to this destination and with its growing Pacific population, we are not meeting the demand for fresh fruits and vegetables. The 2019-2020 Budget for \$200,000 will address this problem through the provision of agro inputs and fund post-harvest, handling activities to our BQA farmers.

Farm Access Road: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programme involves the construction and upgrading of farm roads with a total allocation of \$800,000. This is to facilitate the transportation of inputs to farm and agriculture produce to markets. It will ensure quick market access for farmers in remote and rural areas.

The Ministry supports women in agriculture, specifically through the Cottage Industry Programme, with funding allocation of \$180,000. This programme is implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Women and youth are also indirectly supported through various other programmes which among others include the Rural Outer Island Programme (ROI), Export Promotion (EPP), Food Security (FSP), Sigatoka Development (SDP), Dairy and Coconut Development. The Government has allocated a total of \$3.79 million for these programmes. Ministry's intervention will cover provision of planting materials, infrastructure development, small machines and building of farm houses, to name a few.

Livestock: Mr. Speaker, the livestock sector will comprise of modern competitive value chains that are sustainable, resilient and diverse, providing livelihood opportunities for youth and women and contributing to economic growth and food security.

Goat Development: Mr. Speaker, goat production for the last five years have been consistently increasing at an average rate of 29 percent. The only fresh/chilled goat meat exported in the last five years was in 2015 and 2016, where Fiji exported to Nauru. The Goat Extension Development Programme has been allocated a budget of \$200,000 and activities will focus on the following:

- a) Strengthening the goat industry through improving bloodline by developing two Multiplication Centres and three Breeder Supplier Farms. This is to assist Sigatoka Research Station in the supply of quality breeding stock to the remaining farmers;
- b) Upgrading of the existing Multiplication Centres;

- c) Improving breeding programme through introduction of new breeding techniques and increase the supply of good quality breeding stock;
- d) Improving health of animals by providing vaccination against scabby mouth and clostridia diseases.

Dairy Industry Support: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programme in the past years has been focusing on infrastructure development targeting the establishment of smallholder dairy farms. The 2019-2020 Budget allocation of \$1 million will fund the establishment of 40 new dairy farms in the Central and Western Divisions and this will continue for the next five years. These farms have been identified by the extension team and the focus activities will be on infrastructure development and pastures establishment.

The forecast production supplied from the new farms will gradually increase from 0.24 million in the first year to 1.9 million in year five. The plan for the year is to expand the dairy area to the *Tikina* of Waidina in Naitasiri, and also to the sugar cane areas in the Western Division. The Dairy Industry Support Programme is earmarked to assist small holder farms to increase production and at the same to promote dairy in the rural areas.

Pig Extension Programme: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the main objective of Piggery Extension Development Programme is to introduce significant intervention measures and to move to address the increasing trend of import and the declining trend of quality of pig supply to the registered slaughter house. The budgetary allocation of \$180,000 will focus on three major components such as nutrition, breeds improvement and infrastructures as a way of addressing the production shortfall currently experienced in the pig industry.

In terms of nutrition, the use of local feed ingredients will be encouraged for the formulation of animals and livestock feeds. Artificial breeding (artificial insemination) will be consolidated whereby the technology will continue to be practiced on private farms using semen of genetically superior breeding boars to improve stock.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me state that given the commitment made by Government to the Agriculture sector under this Budget, timeliness of implementation is critical if the objective of the Government to grow the sector is to be achieved. The Ministry of Agriculture will ensure that proper Monitoring and Evaluation systems are in place to monitor progress on programme implementation. At the same time, we will continue to find efficiencies and streamline our processes, so that this assistance is provided promptly and to those that need it most.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by stating once again my appreciation for the allocation and the support to the honourable Minister for Economy for presenting to Fijians a well-planned Budget. This Budget will go a long way in elevating the living standards of all Fijians and enable us to continue to build our economy for our future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I extend my full support for the Budget. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the honourable Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development. I now give the floor to the honourable Lynda Tabuya. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Good morning, Mr. Speaker. The honourable Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers, and my colleagues, the honourable Members of Parliament: I rise, Mr. Speaker, to respond to the 2019-2020 Budget but before I do so, I just wish to respond to the honourable Viam Pillay and just remind him if he has forgotten history that in 1987, his leader, the current honourable Prime Minister was our Leader's boy, as the Navy Commander, and he supported the 1987 *coup*.

HON. MEMBER.- As if.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Also that the 1987 *coup* is long and gone, and the honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, our Leader, has redeemed himself when he negotiated with the leaders of other races in this country which resulted in the formulating of the 1997 Constitution where everyone's interest is protected with multiracial and claimed internationally as one of the best Constitutions in the world. So in the sugar industry, under our honourable Leader, as a Boom but now it has become a doom under their 2006 *coup* Leader, so stop ridiculing the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I humbly stand before this esteemed House, not just as an individual but as a voice of the nation in pain; a nation whose workers are hurting from deep economic wounds; a nation's anger is real and its concerns demand the undivided attention of its leaders and not its ridicule.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, I will attempt to give voice of their concerns and pray that I do so, not in the spirit of finding fault, but rather in the hope that together, we may honestly identify the problems and find solutions to what will be a painful period of transition and adjustments.

Now, in my presentation, I will attempt to highlight how I believe this Budget is crippling our economy and increasing poverty amongst half our population in terms of my shadow portfolio, which is Housing and also Local Government.

Now, I will conclude by offering some possible solutions that, hopefully, the Government will take into account.

Now, in this current Budget (which is lauded as the "Bainimarama Boom" modelled after Singapore), yesterday, the honourable Members of the Opposition, including myself, have vividly illustrated our thoughts via the display of these brightly coloured "Boom" packets.

Mr. Speaker, I have consistently called out the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it may be because the citizens of Fiji deserve nothing more than the truth, and the truth is the liquidity problem that I have been highlighting, is only a symptom of the big problem.

There is a problem, now whether the Government admits it or not. The big banks should have come out and admitted it officially but they have not, for fear of being victimised. However, the facts remain to support my position first espoused in February this year and it still remains my position. And all these facts can simply be gathered by talking to people (which I have) who are in the know, including bankers (off the record), bank customers (myself included), businesses, lawyers, and real estate agents but not from the bunch of FijiFirst "Yes" people.

The facts are these: The interest rates have gone up. Aggressive term deposit drives by the banks to raise cash, loan settlements have been postponed in some cases without definitive new settlement dates, no new loans to staff and huge reductions in approved new loans to customers.

The honourable Prime Minister is not here. Yes, I admit I am not an economist but neither is he and neither is his Minister for Economy. But it really does not take rocket signs (it does not), and it does not take someone with an Economics Degree to see what is going on. Just talk to people on the ground, the stakeholders, the public who have messaged me directly, and you shall discover the truth.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is, this is an austerity budget. An “Austerity Budget” is defined as a budget with policies that aim to reduce Government Budget Deficits through spending cuts, tax increases, or a combination of both. Now, austerity measures are used by Governments around the world when they find it difficult to pay their bills or their debts.

Our Government is finding it increasingly difficult to operate and deliver on its promises, with \$1 billion less than expected in its Budget to pay its \$4.8 billion in debt. It is desperately trying to cut costs ahead of payments to our foreign and domestic lenders, debts that have repayments due within the Budget cycle. It appears that in our haste to develop a Singapore-like economy and borrowing billions of dollars to pour into our roads and infrastructure, we have run out of options.

The sad reality is that, this austerity budget is not a “fiscally responsible” choice, but a necessary and painful path we must now face as a nation.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, our country and our economy is barely keeping itself above water. The vast majority of our citizens are struggling. We have all seen the increased aggressiveness in which the LTA imposes traffic and e-ticketing funds, even to the extent of punishing honesty and compassion in the occasional situation where our people need to get home and they do not top up, so they offer cash and then we have the bus driver who shows compassion to the passenger who travels every day in this same bus, he says, “I will help you get home”, but our people are punishing them with huge fines.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, a law that you imposed or how FRCA has aggressively tried to squeeze more taxes out of individuals and small to medium businesses, incentivising FRCA staff with commissions. They will make the more that they collect, the more commissions they make, constantly auditing business and individuals who themselves are struggling to pay bills or obtain new loans from banks.

The laying off of thousands of workers, like my brothers and sisters in Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) due to Budget cutbacks and thousands more on temporary contracts, constantly worrying if this week will be their last on the job.

The 50-cent plastic bag levy is an exorbitant ECAL taxes. These are part of the structural adjustments that are synonymous within austerity budgets.

In theory, austerity budgets are praised as being physically responsible but this is far from being economical with the truth. The studies by world renowned scholars like Noam Chomsky have shown that austerity budgets are often used by dictatorial regimes.

Developing countries in Europe, most notably Greece, had austerity budgets and structural adjustments forced on them by the IMF only to end up with high unemployment, high suicide rates and rampant drug use. Is this a trend that sounds frighteningly familiar?

The honourable Minister for Economy controls 61 percent of our entire National Budget expenditure through a requisition system where each Ministry has to reapply the funds now. A very simple analogy is that the Minister is like a father who promises his children \$10 spending money to each, but instead of giving the full \$10, the child gets \$4 and if they want the remaining \$6 they need to make their case to their father and it is entirely his decision whether to give that \$6 or not.

What we see from the Budget trends in the last sitting to now, is that the \$4 used by the children or the budget given to the Ministries was only enough to cover operating expenses and that the remaining \$6 or the remaining that is under “R” make up funding for the Ministerial programmes were never paid out in full. This 61 percent of the 2019-2020 Budget Estimates will need approval from the Minister for Economy and will encompass pretty much most of the 2018 Elections promises.

In the past budgets, these requisition allocations have never been fully spent or approved by the Minister for Economy, so here you have Ministries given just enough funds to operate but without the full funds to really make any meaningful difference in the lives of our citizens. What good is a Ministry that is fully operational but does not have the financial means completely or the tools to help its people? How frustrating it must be for our Ministers?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Good people on the other side ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... as competent as they maybe, do not have the autonomy to deliver much-needed services to our people? How disempowering it must be to have a boss that is nothing less than a control freak who micro-manages and does not trust his own team with freedom.

This must deplete morale, it must reduce confidence and added stress.

Mr. Speaker, please, allow me to now to shed light on this austerity budget impacting this nation in the area of housing. Now, the right to adequate housing is not only a basic human right, but is a right protected by our Constitution. It is the responsibility of the State to take reasonable steps in ensuring that every person can gain access to adequate housing and sanitation.

Of course, our Constitution further elaborates that if the State cannot provide accessible and adequate housing, then it must prove it cannot do so. This is pertinent given the requisition requirements mandated by the Minister for Economy and the type of scrutiny which we will require later when we get to the Committee of Supply hearings, and the United Nations also defines accessible and adequate housing. It is more than just the four walls and a roof. It is the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity. Ignoring this fundamental human right, Mr. Speaker, will only lead to increased social problems which we now see every day, homelessness, job loss, poverty, hunger, social isolation, inequality and drug abuse.

While there are several groups of people in Fiji with an adequate housing, including homelessness and street dwellers, by far, the largest number of our citizens (about 80,000 in total) live in squatters and informal settlements? Often they are seen on the seaside highways and mangroves. They also exist on road reserves and State foreshore land.

A troubling aspect of squatter settlement is inadequate access to sanitation, with most of their human waste discharged directly into the sea or via pit toilets. Sadly, the Environment Department, which the Minister for Environment should note, has pretty much turned a blind eye on this form of environmental degradation by improper sanitation, by spending most of their resources going after bigger companies or maybe playing chase up to the highly exposed projects, like the Freesoul Real Estate Development (Fiji) Pte. Limited who are able to perhaps afford to comply to industry standards but not focusing, why are they not focusing on the merely 10 percent of our population living in squatter and informal settlements where lack of sanitary conditions, human waste and lack of rubbish collection contributes to our environmental problems in a far more significant way?

So what is this solution to the Housing issue in Fiji? If our economic model is Singapore, then our solution is to aggressively expand housing development through our Housing Authority of Fiji, just as Singapore has successfully done. To fully realise the Singapore Housing model of supplying adequate housing, all economic factors must be taken into consideration.

The first hurdle to supplying adequate housing is inadequate availability of land. The solution is for Government to directly purchase or lease land from landowner units to supply more land to the market. It then must allow entities such as the Housing Authority of Fiji and incentivized private developers to scale up land development at a much faster pace.

Housing Authority delivers no more than approximately 1,500 land lots per year. At this rate it will take over 50 years before they can develop enough land for the merely 80,000 people in squatters and informal settlements and this does not account for any growth in population or building houses on the land which is an even larger problem.

The second hurdle, inadequate development approval framework. Government permits take way too long or are too tedious to obtain. Files go through too many different departments, too many different desks and frequently lost or misplaced. We recognise the Government's recently announced new initiative to streamline the building permit but this process is just not enough.

Part of the solution lies in outsourcing to private certifiers who act as agents for the planning authorities to persist with processing and speeding up the backlog of applications, reducing or eliminating lost files and duplicated resources. They would be generally compensated based on productivity. We have more than an adequate supply of labour, Mr. Speaker, both local and also overseas together with capital and the level of entrepreneurship via savvy developers in Fiji to ensure our housing solutions are met.

This comes with the caveat of course that the laws and tax incentives are applied consistently and expeditiously and risk profiles are acceptable. Now part of our current challenge is that land and house packages are just too expensive and unaffordable for most of our citizens. Housing Authority targets developed serviced land lots for approximately \$40,000. Now a small two-bedroom home build to quote today, costs approximately \$80,000 bringing the total cost of a land and house package to about \$120,000; too expensive for the vast majority of Fijians who live in these settlements. The solution which I propose, after speaking to the stakeholders are:-

- 1) We must design and build medium to high density housing versus just individual land lots on a massive commercial scale. Just like Singapore, to help bring down land and development costs, infrastructure costs and construction costs which can come about from economies of scale, newer building methodologies and technology. This will help generate savings of approximately 20 percent, bringing down the total land and home cost to about a \$100,000.
- 2) Government must take its constitutionally-mandated role to provide adequate and affordable housing for 80,000 of our poorest people seriously by making a commitment to put all these people into housing over the next 10 years. For example, a dollar for dollar, one for one investment programme. Every dollar that a person gives, the Government gives a dollar so the Government invests \$50,000 per home via subsidy if the prospective home owner also commits to \$50,000 for the long-term investment.
- 3) How much will this cost Government? \$80,000 for the people equates to approximately about 20,000 homes if you give an average of four people in a home. 20,000 homes times the \$100,000, alright \$2 billion but the Government's commitment would be only 50 percent or a billion dollars. Now if this programme is rolled out over 10 years then this will cost the Government about \$100 million annually or only approximately 2.5 percent of the current budget. This is very easily achievable by reprioritising line items within the current budget such as maybe diverting the ECAL proceeds. Which is more important? Climate Change initiatives or putting our poorest people into adequate and affordable housing? If we got really smart ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... we might even be able to design green homes and apartment buildings that qualify for green or Climate Change funding. From international markets which is becoming more readily available, plus you will be killing two birds with one stone.

- 4) How much will this cost each family? \$50,000 over a 20-year loan at a concessionary interest rate of say 2.5 percent will cost a family approximately \$60 weekly or \$1.36 per hour if you are working fulltime which is approximately 34 percent of a person's wage if they are earning \$4 per hour.

Again, very achievable. Now, home ownership for all, even those in informal settlements is a very achievable goal. It is a very exciting goal. Why can we not see it? Why can they not see it? Why are we not doing it? It is because it is not a priority. Government is sleeping at the wheel with respect to housing. It is time to wake up and get serious about fixing our most significant problems instead of just talking about it and offering Band-Aid solutions.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You read the Budget. It is in the Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Now to conclude Mr. Speaker, the transitions and structural adjustments brought about by this austerity Budget will mean a painful journey ahead, which is why I cannot support this Budget in its current form.

But, this is not end, nor is it a journey that only the honourable Minister for Economy, Ministers or the Government need to take alone. Just as the Government belongs to all of us so too must the

challenges we face. This is not your problem and this is our problem to fix. It is a lesson in humility for the Government to come clean and admit, okay, you failed our people and \$1 billion less this year in service delivery to our people. A quarter of the Budget to accomplish this; we need more dialogue and consensus building amongst stakeholders because although we may live as one, no man is an island.

Looking at the challenges and solutions we face in trying to build more adequate affordable homes that are climate resilient, environmentally conscious and well-planned through properly elected local councils in Fiji, I have realised that a happy home is first built on the foundation of love. Now we can keep criticising each other; my Bible is bigger than your Bible, removing the motes and beams from each other's eyes, an eye for an eye, but really, Honourable Speaker, what is the universal value that binds us all? It is love.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Love for our people then ourselves, service to our people to the best of our abilities, to deliver the best services to our people that puts our people first and realises the dreams and aspirations of our people in the first three words of this Constitution, "We the people." Thank you Honourable Speaker.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments which will be held in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume in half an hour. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.42 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.16 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members we will continue with the debate. I now call upon the honourable Vijendra Prakash, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Before I start, I would like to correct the honourable Lynda Tabuya with regards to her statement that she made this morning. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister was not a naval Commander during the 1987 *coup* ...

(Chorus of interjections)

... as he was away on duty in Sinai. I ask if you can correct your facts before announcing such false information in this august House. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would further like to remind honourable Tabuya that she was a little toddler in 1987.

(Laughter)

She does not know the facts and the suffering the people of this nation went through and she continues to mislead this House. My advice to her is to please research and correct her facts before she tries to say anything in this noble House.

Secondly, honourable Speaker, Sir, as for the budget “R” is indeed requisition, however, please do note that the Minister for Economy does not approve the request for funding from Ministries. The Permanent Secretary does all the due diligence and approval. Maybe next time, the Opposition including honourable Tabuya would be advised to attend the budget consultation so they would be able to understand the budget properly and would be able to advise the House accordingly.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Thank you, honourable Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and the audience. It is an honour and a privilege to contribute to a budget for 2019-2020, delivered successfully by the honourable Minister for Economy and Attorney-General on the 7th June in this Parliament.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, while the Minister for Economy and his hardworking team were busy preparing and finalising the budget few weeks earlier we heard so many mistruth, gossip and unjustified criticism with no purpose except to attack without any evidence. There were even, Mr. Speaker, unbelievable rumours that our nation was on the verge of collapse and the forthcoming Budget will bring a lot of sufferings to the citizens of our country. The rumours were irresponsible and unpatriotic. Are critics trying to weaken confidence in our economy? Do they understand that this will badly affect every Fijian especially those in the grassroots? I do not think that the Oppositions side of the House quite understands this, worse still was the adverse coverage on the media and social media which was....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Listen!

Worse still was the adverse coverage on the media and social media which was masterminded by a few irresponsible leaders and academics with obvious political interest. Sir, this shows a total disregard for the peace and security of the people in this country, which was more of a prophecy gone wrong from some false prophets some may call them. While this side of the House speaks of a boom the other side will always speak what they know very well, doom. Mr. Speaker that has been their way of thinking since they moved into the shadows, and I might say even before they became shadows.

These people will attack and criticise everything assuming that people are too blind to see their agenda. Well guess what, majority of the voters saw right through you.

Mr Speaker Sir, some went on to lie that those voted for this Government back to power will have to face major problems, while strong and wise government side of leaders and its Members of Parliament had pledged to safeguard and make life of all people of this country progressive, interactive and satisfactory.

The reality however was that the National Budget delivered by the honourable Minister for Economy proved everything the critics said was false. Mr. Speaker Sir, the Bainimarama boom and the 2019-2020 Budget added a smile to majority of Fijians as soon as it came to their knowledge, and those criticising were left shocked and lost for words. Left biting their lips pondering what is that excellent ideas have come from? Mr. Speaker Sir, as soon as the Budget Address by the honourable Minister was completed, happiness was noted on most faces while the blessing in the form of rain showered on Parliament building and around Fiji.

Nature also celebrated inclusive Budget for all. Mr. Speaker Sir, ten years of continuous growth in the Fijian economy is a celebration for all and positive minded people who have treasured it with full confidence in the FijiFirst Government and now the majority of voters continue to pledge their support saying that there are currently no better managed Government than the FijiFirst Government which cares for everyone without discrimination.

Mr Speaker Sir, major initiative through the Ministry of Communication is raising public awareness and keeping the Fijian people connected locally and with the outside world. The Fiji Government's digital transformation programme to bring key government services online is highly commended. Grant to popular *Walesi* programme of \$10.3 million will further entertain and educate our population across the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the upgrade of ICT infrastructure is an investment to modernise Government services is a timely development for this nation. Mr. Speaker, each family unit in Fiji has a dream of owning a sweet home, an asset that provides security to members of the family. Our country has a history of pain and suffering under past Governments. Their policies did not actively encourage home ownership. In fact actively discouraged home ownership through backward policies which only benefited them. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, meant 10,000 of Fijians ended up in uncertain informal settlement. Some of the leaders who failed our people are sitting right across the floor, right now, and still encourage the same old backward

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- ...policies that have caused us so many problems previously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allocation of \$19.9 million for Ministry of Youth and Sports is highly appreciated. Sporting events play a valuable role in shaping our youth with values that promote a healthy and hearty lifestyle. Our sports ambassadors have made the entire nation to be proud of their unique talent in each sport they represent. The rugby, soccer players and our athletes are highly commended for all their sacrifices in adding much needed smiles to all Fijians and former Fijians worldwide.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocation of \$33.9 million to the Ministry of Waterways and Environment will definitely protect environment, make more land accessible to productive farming and contribute brightness to our beloved Fiji. It will create an atmosphere for clean, safe and vibrant bio-diversities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, collectively all Fijians and visitors to Fiji must assist to fight in removing all toxic materials that pollute our environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, National Budget are not only to reflect Government's spending, capital development and paying of loans. But it also empowers each and every individual to be part of national growth, to have input in national development and be an asset to the nation. Each citizen's prosperity creates an opportunity for all to benefit. Learn from each other and be counted as an example to the others.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will fail in my duty if the correct message is not passed to distractors who are banned from destroying all that have been achieved for the nation, especially, by the FijiFirst Government. My plea to these people is to please stop spreading false and destructive lies to the people of our beloved nation. Give up such destructive propaganda, be honest, truthful and responsible and join hands with FijiFirst Government for the dynamic and visionary approach which we possess to continue to make Fiji a great place for all Fijians.

Honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and the Members of Parliament, our hearty congratulations for contributing to the National Budget 2019-2020. That has left our opponent shocked for many days after it was announced. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is time to build bridges to the best we can for all our Fijian families and make Fiji the best destiny for all to enjoy living. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to address this august parliament, and I whole heartedly support the 2019-2020 National Budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the Debate. I now give the floor to the Leader of the National Federation Party, the honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. After listening to the contributions from the Government side and also from the Opposition side, I actually decided to put aside my Budget notes for two reasons:

Firstly, I have to respond to some of the issues raised by the Government side, but I want to congratulate the Opposition side. In fact the contributions from the Opposition side on specific issues backed with data, backed with evidence, and has been exemplary. My work is easier now, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak slowly, so I hope the interjections are also slow from the other side. But first, Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister yesterday grossly misrepresented my paper of 2010, where I actually talked about the Global Financial Crisis and how Government at that time needed to adopt an expansionary fiscal policy. But, Mr. Speaker that does not mean that the Government

continues with the expansionary policy beyond economic stability and let alone continuing it for nine years, but that is history. That is exactly what I also said in 2014. In fact, I would say to the honourable Prime Minister actually I am happy that he is reading my papers but if the Government side reads my Budget speeches over the last four years they will actually find an alternative Budget being proposed in those very carefully crafted responses about what the Government should do and should not do. And if they had taken that advice five years ago we would not be in a situation that we are in right now.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Government won the Election in 2014 and that was the best time for them to consolidate their finances. But they carried on in their campaign until 2018 and were spending money like blind folds and we are now caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, last night the Government Whip, the honourable Alvick Maharaj quite despicably should I say attacked the Opposition, supposedly making racist comments especially in relation to cane growers and camouflaging it as cane growers of all ethnicities. In fact he took swipe at NFP when he ignored that the President of the National Federation Party actually said that he disagreed with the comments that might had been implied by honourable Kuridrani.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He goes to attack and then honourable Maharaj then take a swipe on honourable Bulunauca basically accusing him of distorting names and not calling the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General, honourable. Yet he himself coined a shorter versions of the name of the honourable Leader of the Opposition and two other honourable Opposition Members.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is like a case of the pot calling the kettle black. I mean what honourable Maharaj was uttering last night, Mr. Speaker, is nothing new. It is a racial venom which was successfully used by the FijiFirst Party in the last Election.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In the last Election. If you look at the advertisements on the television authorised by the honourable Minister for Economy it was one of the most racist advertisements; “A vote for Biman is a vote for Rabuka, a vote for SODELPA.”

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It’s true.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Speaker, they even created fake news, saying that honourable Rabuka will take away the Diwali holiday. I mean, these are the kind of lies and racial venom. I know some of them are going to temples, especially to indo-Fijian audiences and saying, “*Areh*, you will be finished if Rabuka comes in with Biman’s support.” This is the kind of racist comments that they were trying to spew and create fear.

The reality is, honourable Speaker, that the NFP President quite rightly made it very clear that we do not support that kind of view on cane growers. But honourable Maharaj, as many others on the other side, get stuck to the script that they were given and continue attacking us unnecessarily.

In fact, honourable Maharaj should ask the honourable Attorney-General what they were doing at Level 9. I was kind of wondering, honourable Speaker, whether he got the low hanging fruit or he got the venomous fruit which he is spewing now.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Anyway, Mr. Speaker, let me get to the Budget. But before that, let me say this again and I have said this before, that this is a Government, not every one of them, in fact, there are many of them, Mr. Speaker, on the other side who will privately tell you how dismayed they are, how no one is consulting them, how they are given speeches to read, but obviously this is a Party which is suffering from a culture of sycophancy servility.

We do not need advice from sycophants, I think, but let me say this that this is a Government which is suffering from cognitive dissonance. It is a disease where you begin to believe everything that you do, even if the reality is staring at your face, you do not believe it. And when someone shows you the reality, you get very angry, you attack them. You personalise them. You say, "This person is not fit. This is what they do."

But let me come back to the Budget, Mr. Speaker. We remember the 2018-2019 Budget as the one where Government ran out of ideas, but we will definitely remember the 2019-2020 Budget as the one where Government has run out of money.

Listening to the Budget speech, Mr. Speaker, I actually felt sorry for the honourable Minister for Economy. He looked like a man, who did not want to be in the House on that day, and he looked like a man who did not want to talk about the Budget. So he did, he did talk about the Opposition, he talked about the National Bank of Fiji, he talked about school gardening competitions, he talked about how children jumped on milk cartons, but he did not talk on why the Government has no money.

Not once did he say to the people of Fiji what he should be saying on behalf of the Government and on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister:

"I am sorry that after years of spending your money to get your votes, there is no money left.
I am sorry that in this financial year, my tax collections fell \$1 billion short.
I am sorry that because Fiji is now so far in debt, I must now cut spending on education, health and basic services.
I am sorry to the tourism industry. I am sorry that even though they compose a large part of the whole economy, our taxes are damaging the economy, but I cannot afford to reduce the taxes.
I am sorry to the lowest-paid workers that we promised that we will review the minimum wages and now we are taking more time and more time."

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Minister blamed the people. He blamed the students who wanted to study away from their hometowns. He accused parents for free riding on buses using the student cards. He blamed children cashing their parent's welfare cheques. Why is he blaming the people? Because he needs an excuse to cut the Government spending.

He says to the people, “It is not my fault, it is your fault.” This is what this Government is about. When things are good, it is always about what they did, but when things are bad, it is always about someone else’s fault.

I also heard the honourable Prime Minister and some honourable Ministers talk about how we are doing this because there is a slowdown in the global economy. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, where do they get that? Of course, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) says there might be a slowdown, but let me just give you an example. This is the latest issue of the Economist Magazine; latest issue. It says, “The greatest job boom”, and I will quote from that:

“In 2018, the employment rate among people of working age was the highest ever in Britain, Canada, Germany, Australia and 22 other OECD countries.”

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the kind of lie and misinformation that they want to spread to cover for the mismanagement of the economy for the last 10 or 12 years.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It says, I will read you this: “Across the rich world, an extraordinary jobs boom is underway”. This is May this year. Anyway, honourable Speaker,

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I said in the last Budget that the Government was spending money like drunks in a nightclub. And I remember one person in the social media who criticised my statement and this is what he said, Mr. Speaker, “You are being unfair to drunks. At least drunks spend their own money.”

He is right, because this Government has spent the people’s money to keep themselves in power. They have brought themselves into power by using the people’s money for their propaganda, and using the people’s money to hand out freebies to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the confidence trick, when you borrow and spend and take photographs - opening roads and bridges and handing out SME grants, things look great for a while. But look at where we are now, this year the money has run out.

Let me give you an example. This is from their own fiscal supplement. One billion dollar’s reduction in expenditure. This is not a small adjustment, but last year this Government projected that they will collect \$4.2 billion revenue. They actually collected \$3.2 billion; this is the estimate.

This year, they are projecting that they are going to collect \$3.4 billion revenue, yet you have reduced the expenditure by a billion dollars. In fact, last year the economy was growing because there were all these reckless spending going on in the economy, and now they are saying that we are going to collect more revenue from what they collected last year.

They are reducing the economy, projecting the economy and they are hoping that they will collect instead of \$3.2 billion, they will collect \$3.4 billion revenue. That is why, Mr. Speaker, this Budget has so many holes. In fact, I feel sorry for the honourable Ministers on the other side because they all talked about what they were going to do with the Budget allocation. If you go by what they had collected with the growth in the economy in the last financial year, what are they going to collect? There is no way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they can collect \$3.4 billion revenue that is projected. What will be the effect? The effect will be that the economy will contract further and further.

Mr. Speaker, one of the funnier parts of the honourable Minister's speech was about the National Bank of Fiji (NBF). Yes, it was a disaster. They sold the telecommunications network, but 23 years after that we are in the same situation. We do not have the telecommunications network but the debt level that this Government has put upon itself, now they might be selling the electricity network. That is the reality and what they have been doing is setting up the stage to actually sell Energy Fiji Limited (EFL).

I know they tried to sell EFL. There are a number of people who were on the list of people who were interested in buying EFL. None of them bought EFL. So now, the honourable Minister is engaged in raising the tariff. He has already said that the tariff will be increased when the consultations

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You were quoted, you said that!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order. Honourable Professor Prasad, again, is misrepresenting in this Parliament, even prior to this.

In the discussions that took place over the media exchanges, honorable Professor Prasad talked about tariff rate increase. The statement that I gave to the media, I said, "We cannot pre-empt it. There is a particular process. They could increase it, they could decrease it, but we have to wait for the outcome." That was the statement I made. I never said that tariff rate would increase. He is completely misrepresenting the facts. Please, have some decency.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Before I conclude, let me say something about the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS). If you go to its website, Mr. Speaker, you will see that its vision is to become a world-class revenue service. Instead, as the Government runs out of money, it has become more like a world-class mafia organisation. Hundreds of businesses, large and small, are being harassed. If there is one small misstep or mistake, FRCS demands a \$50,000 fine.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, FRCS auditors are running around issuing ridiculous tax assessments. They are doing it all in a rush because they have to find money for the Government. They are not listening to taxpayers' explanations.

Mr. Speaker, Government bureaucracy is not the only threat to foreign investment, FRCS is a major problem. In most well-run economies, the tax agency is a trusted regulator. People may not like paying taxes but they respect the agency. In Fiji, FRCS gets more desperate to collect money. It has lost the respect of the business community, but has become one more disaster on Fiji's investment horizon.

Honourable Speaker, it is time to stop pretending that this Government has created a sustainable economy. This is not a successful economy. This is not a strong economy. It is a mediocre economy, fuelled by debt and hopelessly distorted by regulation, and worst is yet to come.

Even though the facts are staring at the Government on the face, Government refuses to acknowledge it. It refuses to warn people that hard times are ahead, it has no solutions. It is happy to cut spending now because it does not have to worry about an election.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is loud and boastful when things are going well, but when things are beginning to go bad, it does not want to talk about it. That only shows this Government's lack of courage and its lack of care for the poorest in our society, who in the coming year, will be the hardest hit.

Mr. Speaker, no one rejoices in warning that tough economic times lie ahead, but the next two years are going to be extremely difficult for our people. We are about to find out what happens when the Government's political spending party is over, when economic confidence is gone, the Government has no solutions, and it does not have the courage to talk about its problems.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly a Government that has lost the moral authority to lead us, and this is what the people are about to find.

Mr. Speaker, confidence in an economy is very, very important. What people do today or what people expect to happen in the future determines what people do today.

This Government does not like the truth, in fact, you will inspire confidence, Mr. Speaker, by telling the truth about the economy; by telling honestly what the problems have been in the economy. If you keep on hiding, the people are not as stupid as the Government might think. The business people out there understand what is happening in the economy. The Bank Managers know what is happening in the economy. These are the people listening to us here and they have a Government which is continuously trying to paint a rosy picture when the reality on the ground is something very different and that is not going to inspire confidence in our investors, in our people, Mr. Speaker. And that is why I am saying that we need to be truthful.

In fact, honourable Prakash was right when he concluded, we need the truth about the economy. We need transparent and an accountable process through which we can hold the Government accountable and this is what the people want. People are listening to the speeches from the Government side and they are out there looking at the businesses, looking at what FRCS does, looking at the regulations, looking at the difficulty in getting a business license and they are saying, "what is this Government all about?" That is the point I want to make, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of the Parliament. I rise to join all my colleagues on the Government side and some honourable Members on the Opposition side who have spoken before me today in commending the honourable Minister for Economy and his team for a comprehensive and forward looking 2019-2020 National Budget.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the allocation package, the policy prescription and the intentions of the Budget to deal with current realities and its vision to secure our nation a sustainable future.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, before I continue I just to respond quickly to some of the comments made yesterday. The honourable Leader of the Opposition made a number of comments which was incorrect. Firstly, he said that in 2009 the deficit between imports and exports were \$1.5 billion and today it has risen to \$3.3 billion; that is not correct. The trade deficit today is \$562 million the 2018 figure. When we provide numbers in this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to ensure that we have the correct numbers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Rabuka stated that agriculture is declining because its contribution has declined from 10 percent to 6 percent that is totally incorrect. Unfortunately, they cannot recall the explanation I gave earlier is that when the proportion of a particular sector is declining, that does not mean the sector is stagnant or the sector is declining. It can also mean that the other sectors are growing at a rate much higher than this sector, that is why the proportion of contribution of this sector; basic statistics. I can show you numbers that the agriculture sector has not declined, its contribution has declined because the other sectors are growing at a rate higher than this sector.

Thirdly, Honourable Rabuka said that in 2007 the Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Programme was cancelled. First he said that the ROI Programme does not exist. We said, “no, that is not true.” Then he said that in 2007 it was not there. No. In 2007 it was there, \$14 million was there. We again had the ROI Programme last year and in this Budget as well; allocation for ROI in the Estimates, Page 181. Again factually incorrect information to this House.

Fourthly, the honourable Leader of the Opposition noted that the \$800,000 allocation was not sufficient for our Food Security Programmes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are number of allocations that has food security dimension to it. If you look at the proposed Budget, a total of \$1.8 million is part for food security programmes. Again an incorrect information and total understatement.

The honourable Member said that we need to move to commercial agriculture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have spoken in this Parliament a number of times that the entire focus of the Ministry is commercial agriculture. In fact the last time I clearly defined as to what does a commercial farmer do? Who is a commercial farmer? What is commercial agriculture? What are the three key attributes?

- 1) You grow further market;
- 2) You create surplus;
- 3) You reimburse the surplus so you can grow annually every year.

But, of course, we are part of the competitive market and that is what we are trying to say. We are going out and I am going to talk about in my contribution about the commercial agriculture dimension.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I want to say is that when we come to this House, we need ensure that we use correction information and data because people are watching us. This is the highest House, we make policies that will affect every individual in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kuridrani made some statements yesterday again factually incorrect. He said that the Ministry's budget, there is a decline by \$21.1 million and therefore there would be a problem with service delivery. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am going to talk about that in my contribution now. Over the years due to an incremental budgeting philosophy that a lot of fact that has been built up in various ministries and this was the opportune time, and of course a lot of gut by any Economy Minister to go and remove those flat-out debts. That is what happened this time around.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Kuridrani also mentioned that in the 2009 Agriculture Census where a number of farmers have declined, we should not look at number of farmers, we should look at the size of agriculture, size of land or area land used for agriculture. What is happening? Whether the land under agriculture is declining? Numbers over time will decline, we want to consolidate.

Look at China, they made a major agriculture reform where to bring in mechanised agriculture they would reduce small holdings, they pull people out of the rural agriculture sector to the urban area so that small farms could be consolidated. They do not understand, honourable Speaker, Sir. All they think of is the number of farmers.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Kuridrani said that the coconut industry had been in existence since independence and not much allocation had been given. Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have got major allocations for the coconut industry, both within the Ministry as well as for the Coconut Industry Development Board. In 2015 there was a budget allocation of \$300,000, now we have got \$750,000. What is the matter with them? Why are they not reading their Budget Estimates? They come into this House with thick documents, they do not ready it, someone writes it for them, they come and regurgitate here.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the honourable Member mentioned about that the livestock sector declining. Of course, we have been mentioning that the livestock sector has been declining because of Brucellosis and TB. Of course we want to eradicate that, and therefore the number of animals, number of eggs would decline, and we want to clean up and then introduce new high yielding breeds. We cannot introduce high yielding breeds now, because they will also get infected with Brucellosis and TB. They can't get it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Kuridrani said that no survey was done by agricultural officers. Honourable Speaker, Sir, again incorrect information. Surveys were conducted by agricultural officers and proper consultation with *Turaga ni Koro* and advisory councillors. The agricultural officers conducted a survey in Kadavu. I do not know why he cannot come and ask us and get clarification before giving incorrect information in this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said, I support the allocation packages, the policy prescriptions and the intentions of the Budget to deal with the current realities and its vision to secure a national sustainable future for the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many institutions in Fiji who have applauded the Budget and its architect, our Minister for Economy for his ability to understand the local and global economy well, noting the aspiration of Fijians, listening to their calls to have a brighter future, wanting to be part of our collective journey to grow Fiji and for understanding the requirements of the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the honourable Minister for Economy has done to deliver this expenditure package which will be supporting policy announcements. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Institute of Accountants welcomed the National Budget with lots of positivity. They noted that the Budget considers the interest of a much wider community and they congratulated the Government for the delivery of a realistic and practical budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of economists within and outside Fiji also commended the Budget. Unfortunately a few out there at USP are continuing to attack the Budget. Honourable Speaker, Sir, an academic is a person whom the society looks up to very highly. Whenever a statement is made by an academic....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- *Wawa..* Whenever an academic makes a statement, Mr. Speaker, it should be based on research, logic and reasoning because you are going to direct the society in that particular code. It is unfortunate that some of the economists are making statements without proper research, logic and reasoning.

Mr. Speaker Sir, honourable Prof. Biman Prasad said that the global economy is not shrinking. On 10th April, 2019, IMF Chief Economist said that the global economy has entered a synchronised slow down, we are now in a significantly weakened global expansion.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ANZ economist based in Sydney, Kishti Sen has applauded the Budget saying that it was the right budget to deal with the local and economic scenarios. Where are we, honourable Speaker Sir?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker Sir, we have had prodigious economic growth in the last decade. Arguably one of the most productive decades in the Fijian history. It has marked the progress developed prosperity of our people. Mr. Speaker Sir, governments over the years have been successful in modernising our country through, reviewing and strengthening archaic legislations, setting enabling environment for a prosperous Fiji, taking global leadership on climate change and protect our natural environment at home, empowering all Fijians to be inclusive with vibrant social policies, driving

technology invasion to digital transformation, manoeuvring our nation during times of climatic and economic uncertainty.

However, going forward, this Budget has been delivered at a time when we are facing numerous challenges. This includes and not limited to a tight and subdued global economic scenario, increase frequency of our natural disasters and its impact to our economy. Given the challenges listed above through careful guidance from our leadership, we have tacked this great realm and have never let this deter us from achieving the greater good.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the true quality of a versatile leader is manoeuvring his people and his country in an era where we are quashed by uncertainty whether it is climatic or economic. Our honourable Prime Minister has rightly done that and has delivered a decade of economic expansion in the last decade rightfully called the Bainimarama boom.

Mr. Speaker Sir, sadly yesterday I noted that some Honourable Members from the Opposition side passing snide remarks on the honourable Prime Minister that he does not understand the meaning of GDP. Honourable Speaker Sir, in 2010 when I was a Chairman of then Commerce Commission, I was invited by the then Minister for Trade, honourable Saiyed-Khaiyum to present to their Interim Government on Telecommunication Interconnection Rates.

Following the presentation, the Honourable Prime Minister asked me to explain about the telecommunication sector's contribution to the economy. I explained to him the employment dimension and how communications local and international is important to the economy. He then asked me of the telecommunication sector's contribution to overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Mr. Speaker Sir, if the Honourable Prime Minister then knew about GDP then I am sure he knows about it back to front now. Mr. Speaker Sir, there is no one in this House who has more knowledge than the Honourable Prime Minister on climate change, its impact on national output; our Gross Domestic Product. He has made a case on this at the world's highest forum over the last three years and given his contribution, he is one of the most sought after leaders even now.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, given his contribution on climate change environment for the first time ever, Fiji was invited to attend the G7 Environment Ministers Meeting in Metz, France a month ago. Fiji was the only country amongst the Pacific Island countries to be invited to be part of the G7 Environment Ministers Meeting.

Honourable Speaker Sir, you combine all the wisdom and knowledge on the other side on practical economics, it will still be less than what the Honourable Bainimarama has. Honourable Speaker Sir, I urge the Members, Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, in particular, do not make those kinds of snide remarks, he knows more than you about Gross Domestic Products.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker Sir, students of governance, international relations, national security, race relations leadership and development economics often line up at his office to interview him given his wisdom on these areas. You also line up there too.

Honourable Speaker Sir, I humbly ask the Members on the other side to respect integrity of this House and show respect to the Prime Minister of this country.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I also noted personal attacks being made on our honourable Minister for Economy yesterday. The honourable Bulanauca called him by the name “Khaiyum”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Sayed-Khaiyum is our Attorney-General, our Minister for Justice and Economy. We ought to give him that respect. He is like our honourable Prime Minister and other honourable Ministers, like your good-self-sacrificing a lot for this country.

In the history of this country, he is the best Finance and Economy Minister we have ever had, while on one hand ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... some Members from the other side of the House are hell-bent on spreading doom and gloom on the economy, our honourable Minister for Economy has worked day and night to deliver a Budget commensurate with the needs of contemporary Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to think beyond the standard Budget-making templates. We need to be pragmatic, realistic and should not lose sight of the economy and of our ordinary Fijians, whose only hope is Government.

Therein lies the difference between the honourable Sayed-Khaiyum and previous Finance Ministers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this expenditure plan offered in the Budget, has:

- 1) removed all the fat that had built-in over the years due to incremental budgeting;
- 2) provided increased allocation to areas which have potential to accelerate economic growth;
- 3) provided for new allocations which have potential to increase national income thus at the same time adding new income to households and sector owners;
- 4) provided the much-needed and sought-after enabling environment for business development and surplus creation, be it in the service sector, the commercial sector, industrial or primary sectors such as Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are tasked to address inequalities that exist in our country, grow those sectors of the economy that have the potential to do so and use a proportion of those surplus to assist the poor, the marginalised to grow and achieve their aspirations, while at the same time provide the public goods and supporting infrastructure for economic growth and security for all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there could not be any better expenditure bundle and policy announcement than what has been presented by the honourable Minister for Economy, and I once again thank him for his intellectual contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my colleague, honourable Sigarara, will speak on rural and maritime development portfolio; my colleague, honourable Viam Pillay, has spoken on plastics, environment and agriculture as well; I will speak on agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture is grateful for the allocation of \$78.7 million in the Budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to budgetary allocation, the Ministry will also receive \$9.6 million in donor funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture is finalising its Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for the Years 2019 to 2023. The SDP priority areas in this important document are aligned to the National Development Plan (NDP) with the emphasis to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030.

The Ministry will implement the vision of the strategic plan through these following strategy priorities:

- 1) Improve food production and nutrition security;
- 2) Increase farmer household income;
- 3) Improve the adoption of sustainable resource management and climate-smart agriculture;
- 4) Establish and improve commercial agriculture by addressing farmer accessibility to available financial services;
- 5) Improve the value chain; and
- 6) Give market signals to farmers to produce and supply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this forward-looking and progressive plan will allow for the review and inclusion of new ideas over time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we plan also to support several new initiatives introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture in the last financial year, whereby the Ministry of Agriculture will engage on the incubation programme for young farmers, optimising the use of JUNCAO grass to enhance livestock production, upscaling pulse seed production to curb its ever-increasing import bill, establishment of fruit tree orchards, including backyard gardening to our urban and rural communities and growing and expanding agriculture undertaken for the market, that is commercial agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are committed to replicate this initiative throughout the Ministry's decision-making process to ensure timely administration of financial management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry looks forward to further improve Fiji's agriculture statistical system to the allocation of \$4.5 million for the conduct of the 2020 National Agriculture Census.

In addition to the above allocation, allow me to highlight the key livestock programmes, which will positively impact food production and income security. A total of \$11.5 million has been allocated for the Animal Health and Livestock Programme. The focus of these programmes is to improve infrastructure, increase and sustain stock numbers while curbing the instances of animal diseases, as I had alluded to earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had alluded to earlier on, we have a major programme for Brucellosis and Tuberculosis eradication and this is basically undertaken to ensure that we clean up the existing stock that we have so that we can introduce high yielding breeds of cattle, both dairy and beef into the sector to increase productivity and also expand our agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got an Extensive Crop Extension Programme with the Budget of \$12.5 million, and basically we are looking at supporting the Commercial Agriculture Programme that we have in the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also got a Crop Extension Programme as alluded to by honourable Viam Pillay, basically the objective is to improve quality seed production, develop high varieties of crops as well as high breeds of cattle and livestock.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now turn to Waterways and Environment for a brief overview. Mr. Speaker, from the day this Government took office, we have evidence of commitment to putting the well-being of our environment for the current future and generations at the heart of everything we do. The 2019-2020 Budget just shows that we are delivering on the commitment. We have measured and focused on whatever our people value, a protected, healthy people and an environment with stronger communities and a prosperous Fiji. Success for us is ensuring Fiji continues to be both an exceptional place to make a living, and an exceptional place to make a life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Budget is weighed with Government's commitment to safeguarding our national environment through integrated expedient process ensuring that development does not come at the cost of our environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am privileged to be part of the Government that does things differently. The move to ban single issue of plastic bags in seven months, increasing the duty on plastic bags, introduction of the Environmental and private production levy. These are the all the right steps in securing our environment and mobilising public finance for the project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, amongst the Waterways Project, we have got major allocation for rural residential drainage, for dredging of rivers and protecting our communities from adverse effects of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we look forward to implementing the Budget and are quite excited about it. Thank you, *vinaka*.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. I have the pleasure of giving the floor to the honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Members of the Government, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of the Opposition, members of the public in the gallery and those who are watching this proceedings: Firstly, I would like to thank all honourable Members for the contribution. I think it is very critical that some of the issues discussed be addressed. One of the main ones, I think, is the current different interpretations we have regarding what is "racism" and what is "not racism". Some of the honourable Members from the other side of the House have labelled a lot of our contributions or some of the contributions as racist, and that needs to be clarified. I think the origin of all these issues gets back to the 2006 *coup* ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- 1987?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... which was resolved in 1987 by the 1997 Constitution, but going back to 2006, the problem is that, the other side of the House is mixing racism and indigenous rights, that is the confusion. That is something which we need to address as a nation because at the moment, it is a confusion from the other side of the House of what "racism" is, because they are mixing racism and indigenous rights and I would urge them to read the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples which explains what "indigenous rights" is, and you can learn from that, that it is not racism. A lot of our contributions are on indigenous rights, not based on racism that is fundamentally the issue.

Also regarding the contribution from the honourable Prime Minister regarding unity, the responsibility of our honourable Members of Parliament or, we, as Members of Parliament, he mentioned that the people are coming together, they watch together our Rugby Sevens Team as they play, and cheering for our Sevens Team, that is good, but fundamentally, that will not solve our political problems. Our political problems date or can be originated from the current problems from the 2006 *coup*, which resulted in the 2013 Constitution and a lot of the Decrees, et cetera, which were imposed on the nation. So for us as Members of Parliament, where is the starting point? Do we continue to...

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Do we continue like this, as they are responding? Do we continue as they are responding to tell people to get out? No. We cannot get out because who do we represent? We represent nearly 50 percent of the voters of this nation, so what needs to be done is, you represent 50.02 percent and we represent nearly 50 percent, we need to come together and reach a political solution which you cannot do because

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... yes, it is a Parliament. You need to move above your current politics and get above to stay-put, be a statesman. Can you be a statesman - that is what I am asking?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- When you are a statesman, you work towards resolving problems. At the moment, you cannot rise to that level. So I am asking you, honourable Prime Minister and your team, to rise to that level, just move forward and we can do that by firstly answering the letter from our Leader of Opposition on 21st March for bipartisanship on issues. At the moment, no, there is nothing moving forward because you are accusing us of racism and we look at the indigenous rights so we need bipartisanship. Can you do that, I am asking this? Can you move further than that?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Once we do that, we will move forward as a nation because your legal framework and Constitution is imposed. That is the fact of the matter.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- And we who represent 50 percent of the population are here on their behalf to resolve it, but you need to talk to us, and through bipartisanship which has been conveyed to you, the proposal, and there has been no courtesy to reply to the letter of the Leader of the Opposition. We have heard you talking about, "Let's work together, we need to move forward together" but in reality, no one is willing to work together. You cannot work with the Opposition, you cannot listen to the other side, you are listening to those who are making Budget proposals, what about 50 percent of the population who endorsed us, when are you going to listen to them, that is the question, because we are just two years away from the next Elections, and this is a chance, because when we sit on that side, it will be very difficult for you.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, really I try to understand this every day, never before in this place, never before has any government, unprecedented. It is as if no one was here before 2006. I was surprised to have heard one of the honourable Members (honourable Sanjay Kirpal) said that before FijiFirst, agriculture was non-existent - agriculture was non-existent before 2006. That is an insult to everybody who is planting out there, to the average farmer. I am surprised with honourable Reddy and honourable Bhatnagar, the way they referred to the leader, "Honourable Leader", "Supreme Leader", and one of them even referred to him as the "messiah".

(Laughter)

I mean the whole thing when you look at it, to me it looks like brainwashing, they are brainwashed. It is like a whole program of psychological manipulation. They are going through psychological manipulation, they are referring to the leader as "supreme" and the "revered leader", and he is not the messiah. I am really concerned about this nation, honourable Speaker, the way we are going, the next thing we will be next to North Korea.

(Laughter)

Let me get back to this phrase - never, ever before. Let me just go through some of the positive developments before 2006; the establishment of our Cabinet Government in 1996; the establishment of FNPF, who did that?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Previous government.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The previous government. The Housing Authority; the formulation of the Fiji flag that is another big story. That went through a whole process before 1970 et cetera, but a few years ago, they wanted to change the Fiji flag. How much money did they spend, wasting on trying to change the Fiji flag - thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars? Where did that end up? It ended up nowhere.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is the abuse of the Coat Of Arms. This is something that the FijiFirst Flag and everywhere. That looks to me like plagiarism, and that needs to be dealt with. That was not just drawn by a small kid, it has a lot of meaning and you see the emblems inside. I do not know whether they understand or not and that is part of our history. And yet they continue to use 'never ever before'.

Irrigation Schemes at Lakena, Waidovu, there are a lots of things happening; rice farms, have they established a Rice Irrigation Scheme? I don't know. The important agreement was the Lome Convention during Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's days; during his leadership. This enabled the access of Fiji's sugar into the European market at preferential prices. That enabled the sugar industry to survive until 2006 when they took over and everyone knows about the declining in sugar.

The Fiji Pine Scheme; the Suva-Nadi Highway, the Monasavu Hydro-Electric. The long serving Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of FEA said, 'without Monasavu Fiji would not have survived.' Who formulated or who did the plans for Monasavu, who negotiated the land and who negotiated the loan? Was it FijiFirst?

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- No, they were non-existence. The upgrading of the Airports.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The way they go on about the airports is like there was no airports in Fiji. But even for AFL now, this is what I read in one of the reports, 'there was no master plan before'. We did a master plan, I was in the Board of AFL before they threw us out in 2006.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- All the master plans were there, the financial strategies, everything was there, and all they did as usual was copy.

Tripartite forum relationship between unions and the employers, they have destroyed that. Schools and health facilities, the way they go on is that they build all those schools from scratch. No!. From 1960s up to 2005, all the schools were there. A lot were built, you need to go back into history and you need to acknowledge history.

The other one is the development of tax free zones, this was during the SVT era which resulted in thousands of people being employed in the garment industry. Of course, sugar industry, the reforms in 1984 resulting in a rapid cane production of sugar 420,000 tonnes in 1986, today it has deteriorated with FijiFirst leadership, to a 150,000 tonnes. Huge reduction!!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- When we come to revenue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the major revenue streams is VAT. Who introduced VAT? Not them, it was SVT under the leadership of the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. MEMBER.- Under a Decree.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Not a Decree, from Decree it was turned into an Act.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Minister for Economy always says that

(Honourable Member interjected)

Television services, who introduced TV? Of course it was not FijiFirst. And fee free education that existed before. The propaganda, only free education from 2006 that is not right. Highways in Vanua Levu, that is why I am saying, please be careful when you say, "never ever before in history".

Let me go specifically into some of the trade reforms because currently, when you look at the economy, it is a result of reforms conducted in the 1990's. Some of the major reforms comprise or include trade and taxation reforms, public sector reforms, labour market, capital market reforms, and goods and market reforms. Trade and taxation reforms that included the review of trade, the tariff acts and schedules. This was announced in the annual budget and in the late 1990s, this was implemented and later promulgated into Acts of Parliament, establishment of tax free zones. We were offered access under the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement (SPARTECA), so that resulted in a whole lot of economic activity.

As years lapsed and tariffs were progressively reduced, so did the margin of preference available under SPARTECA. Some manufacturing companies ceased operations as they were priced out of the market and became uncompetitive. Other domestic manufacturers managed to survive after embracing capital intensive measures and new technologies.

New foreign manufacturing industries established themselves to take advantage of market access. With import tariffs being cut, direct taxes were also reformed and less reliance on direct taxes meant that new indirect taxes had to be introduced. As a result, the VAT was introduced.

In summary, taxation reforms comprised a shift to broader-based tax system, reduction in protective tariffs, and the simplification of the tax system with a reduction in the number of complex tax bands to ease the burden of tax administration, and increase tax compliance.

The other major reform at that time was the labour market reform. This was another major development as Fiji exporters increasingly competed in the world market. As a result of reduced tariff, their survival depended on competitive price factor inputs to ensure that their price competitiveness was preserved and enhanced. So it was imperative that the whole industrial relations infrastructure was amended which resulted in more consultations with unions through the new labour market reforms. It also focused on enabling wage rates set against performance and productivity. So this was happening from before and in line with training institutions to encourage and frame the curriculum to respond effectively to the labour market demand. Minimum wages were set to protect workers and ensure that they were not taken advantage of, by the employers.

The Tripartite Forum played a dominant role. In terms of capital market reforms, the financial sector also had to undergo reforms. It needed to unlock Fiji's financial system by encouraging and channelling domestic savings into our financial system, into viable and productive investments. One of the key developments at that time was the development of the Capital Market Development Authority and the South Pacific Stock Exchange. So all these happened during those times and never acknowledged by the other side.

All they are referring to is 2006 and the honourable Prime Minister had referred to Year 2006 as year zero. I mean only the birth of Jesus Christ is year zero, and now we are in 2018. So there is confusion about a lot of things from the other side. I need to bring them back to reality that a lot of developments happened before they came in and of course, market reforms, you know, this was also done with the introduction of the Fair Trading Decree. Even the Commerce Commission (Now FCCC – The Fijian Competition & Commerce Commission) came into existence at that time in order to ensure or regulate monopolies and prevent unfair trading practices or pricing.

Also, the ease of doing business, we have discussed this, honourable Minister for Trade. At that time ease of doing business, Fiji was 34th but now it has deteriorated to 101 in the World Bank rankings.

Yes, it is unprecedented, to use their word. Public sector reforms, again this has been happening for some time prior to 2006. It is not only now and I do not think, I have the time to go into details but what I am saying is, the base of what is happening today, which has benefitted FijiFirst, were formulated and implemented before their leadership and those things take time.

It is you know progress, there is implementation progress and there is changes to the legislation and organisation development through the Public Sector Reform and in the Supplement, there is listed there the whole of Government commercial companies, ten commercial statutory authorities, five majority owned companies, seven. All these were established prior to FijiFirst, I do not know whether any was established after 2006, I do not think so. But, one of the matters which concern me is dividend from Government investments in the fiscal year 2017–2018, the Government received a total of \$122.4 million, but, in the 2019 – 2020, a sum of \$76.1 million is expected to be received. A reduction of \$46.3 million or 37.8 percent. I do not know what is happening there, that is quite a big reduction.

The other issue, Sir, before I conclude, regarding revenue and expenditure. Revenue has reduced, they have reduced expenditure in all areas but they have not reduced expenditure listed in the schedule of the Gazette, which increased their salaries.

What I am saying the honourable Prime Minister earns in this Gazette, \$328,000, which is:

- My understanding it is more than the Leader of China - \$328,000;
- Minister of Finance - \$235,000;
- Minister of Health, Education and Transport - \$200,000;
- Other Ministers - \$185,000;
- Assistant Ministers - \$90,000;
- Opposition - \$50,000; and
- Leader of the Opposition - \$120,000.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- You earned about twice more than him, \$120,000.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The Ministers need to reduce their salary to the same level as the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The honourable Prime Minister and the others they need to reduce their salary by \$50,000. The overseas travelling allowance and the UNDP allowance plus 250 percent together with \$600 per day. Cabinet Ministers will receive subsistence allowance plus 200 percent with \$100 per day.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Sir, if we reduce all this there will be a lot of savings. Why are you reducing the accounts and services to the people when you cannot reduce your own salaries? Is my time up? Thank you Mr. Speaker, thank you honourable Prime Minister and Members of Government and the honourable Members of the Opposition. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the honourable Minister of Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs, the honourable Inia Seruiratu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I look across the floor, I do not see the Boom packets that they brought yesterday, except for a few.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Only one.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- It tells me that the Opposition are inconsistent in the messages that they want to tell.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, someone who is fascinated with agricultural machinery and technology, I would propose to the Opposition to come with an alternative. Let us bring a Boom sprayer into this House, because we are at the cross roads, the honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about...I see a few more packets coming up.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- They do not even have faith in what they have.

(Laughter)

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about the revival of the agriculture sector and there was a lot of comments about the non-sugar agriculture sector.

So let us start with a Boom sprayer this morning, because when I heard the interventions from the other side, we are at the cross roads, some of us want to move forward and that is this side of the House and we need to maintain that. But some are undecided and stagnant and some are living in the past Mr. Speaker, Sir. But the biggest one that I have is to choose what goes into the tanks so that they can be sprayed with the right chemical this morning. Because some, I would propose we need to get rid of them.

(Laughter)

That is what a farmer would do when crops are not yielding. Get rid of the crops that are not yielding!

(Laughter)

That is why I suggest to bring the Boom spray this morning because we need to eliminate unproductive crops.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, for those who are undecided, probably some hormones will help.

(Laughter)

When we talk about coconuts, we talk about the senile trees and some have probably come to that age where they are senile and not bearing fruits so they probably need some hormones.

(Laughter)

Unfortunately, honourable Speaker, Sir, he has talked about it. That is why, let us get rid of this Boom detergent and bring a Boom sprayer so that after this Budget debate, we can all move forward for a better Fiji, honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Let me do a few rebuttals. Let me start with the honourable Leader of the NFP, who is always selective of his interventions. Let me quote the chief economist of the IMF, honourable Speaker, Sir, and this article is dated 10th April.

(Chorus of interjections)

This is from Gita Gopinath, the IMF Chief Economist, and this is the statement about the global economy. I quote: “The global economy has entered a synchronised...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Slow down! I will be very slow, so that you hear me well.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, she said and I quote:

“The IMF recently downgraded its forecast for global economic growth for the fourth time in a nine months’ period. We are now in a significantly weakened global expansion.”

That is the global state of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have always talked about the external environment that dictates change within. Let me say that again, I have always talked about this in this House, that external environment dictates the change within. When the external changes are happening, we have to look within and do the necessary changes, so that we can survive and also be current with the terms that are happening in the external environment, otherwise we will always be reactive. Something that we cannot afford.

This Government is always proactive, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We make the analysis, we make the adjustments as necessary so that we survive. We are a small economy, we are a small country, but we are punching above our own weight and doing all our best within the limited resources that we have, so that we can provide for our people. It is not an expansionary Budget, honourable Leader of the NFP.

Let me say sorry to the honourable Leader of the NFP because he said, “2018-2019 Budget, they had run out of ideas. 2019, they had run out money.” But let me say sorry to the honourable Leader of the NFP because it was those ideas in 2018 that brought us here to this side of the House.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The change that he promised did not happen because the difference was in the ideas, and those ideas are here, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about the Budget and said it is about leadership. The leadership is here on this side of the House. We never ran out of ideas, honourable Speaker, Sir, and we never ran out of money, it is just a slowdown in the economy, therefore, we need to adjust and that is what responsible governments do.

We are a responsible Government and we have a responsibility. I look at the honourable Tuisawau smiling, honourable Speaker, Sir, and we need to bear with the President of the Rewa Rugby Union, because I think he was in that state of psychological paralysis because Rewa and Northland have been demoted today.

(Laughter)

And we have given the opportunity for Tailevu to remain in the Skipper Cup. Honourable Speaker, I will come back with a few rebuttals later, if I have time.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Members, I rise today in this House to lend my full support to the 2019-2020 Budget.

Honourable Speaker, I personally wish to congratulate the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his team for articulating a visionary Budget.

Honourable Speaker Sir, the process of budget making is at the heart of successful governments and it is an expansion of public policy, it carries with it the authority of the law. An ideal budget must be an instrument to secure Fiji's future and advance the values of equality, fairness, empowerment, good governance and inclusivity.

The 2019-2020 Budget delivers exactly that. It is a Budget that is forward-looking, innovative and a bold Budget. It is one that will take Fiji to the next level.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, my submission to this august House today is in twofold, reflecting my dual portfolio as Minister for Defence and National Security and, of course, as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, allow me to focus first on the Ministry of Defence and National Security, and the mandated Government agencies responsible for both, security and defence. I have stated in this House already, honourable Speaker, that we need economic growth for national security. Economic development is important for security, and at the same time security is also important for economic growth. And that is why you will see the allocations given to the Ministry because we have had sustained growth in the last 10 years, and we can continue to do so if we create the environment.

It is not just about the fiscal policies. Let me say as the honourable Minister for Defence, honourable Speaker, Sir, that we have to create an environment, an investor-friendly environment, and that is why national security and defence is so important and cannot be compromised. We cannot bring in investors if we are robbing people at knifepoint, and that is why the role of the Police is so important and that is why we need a strong and very efficient Military and, of course Police Force for the policing and maintenance of security.

Let me go into the details of the National Budget, honourable Speaker, Sir, it recognises a strategic position of this portfolio of services as an enabler in the Government's national socio-economic and political development landscape through the maintenance of a safe, secure and prosperous Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Defence and National Security is one of the four Ministries that has had its budget increased through the allocated total budget of \$16.5 million, and this consists of \$15.5 million for Operating Expenditure, \$700,000 for Capital Expenditure and \$300,000 for VAT.

We have a very small team at the Headquarters, honourable Speaker, Sir, and this allocation will ensure that the Ministry's Headquarters is able to operate and effectively deliver its normal services.

Honourable Speaker, the Aftercare Fund for the Veterans has been re-allocated to the Ministry of Defence and National Security. The Budget allocation of \$11.7 million has been transferred to the Ministry of Defence, and it is the main reason behind the substantial increase in its overall Budget.

The move is timely and appropriate, honourable Speaker, Sir, as this will ensure the integration of support and assistance to our deserving servicemen and women. The allocation of \$200,000 to progress the upgrading of the National War Memorial Project is another initiative by this Government in recognition of their selfless sacrifice.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Fiji, as a maritime State, is obligated to ensure the freedom and safety of navigation within our waters. The allocation of \$400,000 phase fund of the 3DP relocation project from Togalevu Base to Lami Lighthouse facility ensures the compliance to the maritime conventions which we are party to. I have already explained this in this House. This is the role that used to be with Telecom Fiji, and then it went out to the Marine Department, but now it has been back with Fiji's Naval Division, honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry is also delegated the ministerial assignment and the responsibility of the Defence and National Security Legislation and I am determined to review the archaic and outdated RFMF Act 1949 and the Police Act 1965. We have started with the Police Act, in fact, both, honourable Speaker, Sir, and we have the assistance of the New Zealand Government for the RFMF Act, including the Manual of Military Law.

Honourable Speaker, as a Small Island Developing State in the Pacific with the ambition of global and regional recognition, and as a central business hub of the region, it is imperative that the nation

addresses the diverse security threats that exist in the region. These include climate change; transnational organised crimes, such as human and drug trafficking; and cyber security threats. In order to better respond to these threats, the overall Budget allocation for the Ministry of Defence will ensure that operational mechanism capacity and policy advisory support which includes the National Security Strategy is established within the Ministry.

Honourable Speaker, as the central coordinating agency of Defence and National Security, the Ministry will require constant interagency collaboration with relevant national stakeholders, and the Ministry's collaboration efforts also extends to the region as a key player for regional defence and co-operation. We have just hosted the South Pacific Defence Minister's Meeting a few weeks ago, honourable Speaker, Sir, and we are also looking forward to hosting the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Police Ministers Meeting.

Honourable Speaker, the materialisation of our bilateral engagements with Australia's financial expert in the Blackrock Redevelopment Project has seen the construction of the project, and I have already briefed this august House on this.

But let me touch on peacekeeping very quickly, honourable Speaker, Sir. Peacekeeping is a central plank of our Foreign Policy. It also has immense economic benefits to the nation through personal development for our servicemen and women, and the significant multiplier effects of the nations of peacekeeping throughout Fiji.

But I have stated in this House, one of the priorities that we will look into, honourable Speaker, Sir, is the reviewing of our national commitments, particularly on our standby arrangements consistent with the Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) by the United Nations.

Let me say here, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in line with HIPPO and the changing dynamics of peacekeeping throughout the world, it now demands international peacekeeping that has evolved, and has such a set of sustainability requirements which has been required of all troop contributing countries. This includes the advancement of the women, peace and security agenda that progresses SDG 5 - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The Ministry will continue to work with its two Forces in aligning its contribution to the set of the UN requirements.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this brings me to emphasise the constitutional roles of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Fiji Police Force (FPF) and the respective budgeted allocations for the two Forces. Both Forces require a vibrant and conducive platform to shape and drive their future operations.

Considering Fiji's vast EEZ and the porous borders, there is a need to enhance maritime surveillance capabilities of the Naval Division. The provision of *RFNS Savenaca* and *RFNS Volasiga* would, no doubt, enhance capabilities. And the allocation of \$1.1 million, honourable Speaker, Sir, for the recruitment of 40 personnel to operate the two Vessels is, therefore, timely.

Honourable Speaker, in modernising the RFMF facilities and capability development, \$2.2 million is allocated to the upgrade and renovation of Military facilities and procurement of specialised equipment. Honourable Bilitavu, this is an ongoing project based on the interview in which you quoted to the Commander RFMF, we have been providing funds for the upgrade of the infrastructure, equipment

and capabilities within the RFMF as well. This year we are completing the armoury, the work for all stores at Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB).

Honourable Speaker, Sir, let me talk about the Fiji Police Force which has notably progressed in its capacity and capability. As envisaged in its five years structure and reform, Phase 1 focuses on human capital development and we are into Phase 2, honourable Speaker, Sir. I have already briefed the House on what has occurred during Phase 1 and for the second phase and part of the allocation is given in this year's Budget will involve the reform and restructure focuses on operational equipment, enhancement continued prioritised recruitment and absorption of 995 Special Constables. I think the honourable Gavoka raised a previous question about this and honourable Speaker, Sir, we are regularising the Special Constables who are already employed over the years so that they can join the Fiji Police Force.

On that note, honourable Speaker, Sir, let me just say that our fight against drugs will continue and the new allocation of \$800,000 to the Fiji Police Force will provide our law enforcers with the capability to meet operational needs complemented by the provision of \$7.5 million to progress the construction and maintenance of critical infrastructure. May I also add, honourable Speaker, Sir, that the capability improvement is extended to our Maritime Police Unit with the allocation of a little over \$727,000 for small patrol boats.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in the laws of Fiji, the Police is responsible for the search within the 12-mile zone and beyond that is the responsibility of the Fiji Navy. I think I have also alluded this in this honourable House earlier.

Let me just quickly touch on Foreign Affairs. Honourable Speaker Sir, as the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs I wish to acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister whose enduring leadership of this portfolio I have been privileged to assume. The honourable Prime Minister like no Fijian leader before him, has merits to enhance Fiji's global footprint that has connected the world to Fiji. His strong and unprecedented leadership in recent times as Chair of the International Sugar Organisation, President of G77 at China, Co-Chair of the United Nations Oceans Conference, President of the UN Climate Conference COP23 and the Convener of the Climate Action Pacific Partnership Forum has effectively anchored Fiji's reputation as a global leader and trusted ally and advocate for multilateralism. Why do I say this, honourable Speaker, Sir, because multilateralism is currently under threat and therefore we need strong leadership and we are thankful that we have a leader from a small country like Fiji standing and advocating for multilateralism within the changing dynamics of geopolitics all over the world.

Let me just say, honourable Speaker, Sir, on the missions. The decision of Government to close missions does not in any way mean that Fiji's interest in these regions have diminished. Quite the opposite, honourable Speaker, Sir. We are committed to taking relations to a strategic level, it means that the Ministry will consolidate its resources and work smarter and be innovative in the conduct of diplomacy to manage our relations. As we have already alluded to in this House, we are closing Ethiopia but that does not mean that we are covered from there. Why did we go to Ethiopia initially was because of multilateralism. Apart from the African Union, all the UN agencies like we have here in the region are based in Ethiopia, honourable Speaker, Sir. And not only that, Abu Dhabi is only one hour away and we will look at re-assigning that role to Abu Dhabi and of course in Brazil, we will also assign that role to Washington and of course to PRUN in New York as well.

Let me just conclude, honourable Speaker, Sir, that the 2019-2020 Budget lays out the Government's approach to build a strong and united Fiji. Through this Budget, we will expand opportunities for our people to become their working best and to live in a livable, endearing home secure

and globally connected, together in close partnership with all our people, international and regional, dwelling partners, civil societies and private sectors. We can and we will continue to take Fiji forward.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude by saying that the Budget allocations for both my Ministries are more than adequate. It re-ensures that our operations are fit for purpose and that we are well postured and ready to take on the challenges of the 21st Century. The Budget encourages us to work together and smarter, be innovative and to deliver excellent services for our people with promises, greater collaboration and partnership and ensures return on investment.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the time and the opportunity and let me close by reiterating my full support for the 2019-2020 National Budget and commend it. May God bless Fiji, honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the honourable Minister for Defence for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for lunch. Lunch is being provided in the Big Committee Room. At this point, I would like to remind the honourable Women Members of Parliament to make your way to your meeting at the Small Committee Room.

I am grateful to you, honourable Minister for Defence for informing me and the House that Rewa and Northlands are being demoted; it makes my day. Thank you honourable Members, we will adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.56 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.00 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please be seated.

Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on the Budget. I now give the floor to the honourable Peceli Vosanibola. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament. Before I allude to my presentation in response to the Appropriation Bill of 2019-2020, first I would like to comment on the statement made by the honourable Seruiratu in regards to the global trend of the economy in slowing down as we had heard it earlier.

Also I would like to make a statement that on the same report by the IMF Chief Economist that while the global economy continues to grow at a reasonable rate and the global recession is not in the baseline projection, there are many downside risks. Therefore, we hope and pray that the Government with their record of spending spree in past years will slow down and try to prevent and further decline the status of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for Economy for the Budget Address and also the provision of all documents relating to this Budget. However, we did not agree with the number of aspects of this Budget which establishes the basis of our oppositional remarks and I hopeful that the Government or the other side of the House should accept our views for constructive decision making and Parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to express my heartfelt thanks to the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his Budget response whereby our contribution from this side of the House are built on the ideals and also principles enshrined in the response.

As fittingly written on the book of the *Proverbs*, chapter 25 verse 11 and I quote: “The right word at the right time is like precious gold set in silver.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, it merely means that things are becoming clearer. There is nothing more to conceal or hide in this honourable House, and also stated in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 10 verse 26 and I quote, “Do not be afraid of anyone, everything that is hidden will be found out and every secret will be known.”

Mr. Speaker Sir, 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 government 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 and evolving according to popular ideas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, should the Government shun its arrogance and embraces the alternative policies and programmes highlighted in the Budget response by this side of the House, there is still chance of hope and light of ray that we can salvage our economy and the country as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Shadow Minister for Forests, I would like to pay my earnest tribute to my predecessor, the honourable Ro Kiniviliame Kiliraki, who in the last four years was steadfast in his quest for advocating the rights, interests and aspirations of the resource owners and presenting alternative ideologies for the development of the fisheries and forest sector. I would like to announce in this debate our position with regards to these two sectors will remain unchanged.

Sir, I also would like to thank the past Ministers for Forests for their exemplary leadership in the forestry sector which has enabled Fiji to realise its potential and resource based economy, with the development, expansion and operating of the forestry sector creating jobs, opening up plans of forestation and providing raw materials for timber usages.

I must confess, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I have a lot of respect for the honourable Minister of Forests. I humbly plead him as a very honourable gentleman with perfect qualities of leader in the making in his own right and as a second term member of this House to come out of the FijiFirst box of tried, tested and failed strategies to appreciate the alternatives we are proposing from the Opposition to make his task achieving the key targets of the forestry sector possible.

A quick analysis of the Ministry of Forests budget, Sir, it illustrates that the Ministry will receive a total of \$16.5 million of which \$13.3 is for operating expenditures and \$4.5 million for capital expenditures. This represent a decrease of 3.2 percent in comparison with that of last year's budget as the allocation was at a sum of \$17.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having laid the platform for the Ministry of Forests and Fiji's commitment to the Paris Agreement, targeting the reduction and maintenance of our carbon index at 1.5 percent. Sir, the Kyoto Protocol that led to the Paris Agreement established the skies over the Pacific are likely to remain cool for the next 200 years giving us time and appropriate weather conditions to replenish our forest cover and first supplement it with a green economy to achieve the UN Agenda 2030 pertaining to poverty alleviation, clean water and sanitation, healthy living and conservation of our natural resources and eco-systems.

As opposed to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is rather tragic to note how the following activities continue to affect our forest environment:

- i) Exploitation of natural resources by mineral and low value mineral extractions.
- ii) Poorly planned and implemented logging strategies.
- iii) Destruction of native timber sanctuaries by natural disasters and poor development models.
- iv) Damages caused to forest by bush and man-made fires.
- v) Release of toxic waste into our rivers and streams from industrial areas.
- vi) Clearing of forests to make space for further developments.
- vii) Lack of will to implement the reforestation exercise with the zeal that it deserves

Sir, I would like to submit to this House that unless and until these users are mitigated in their proper context, our dream of reducing our carbon index to 1.5 percent will remain a distant dream.

The next issue with regard to Forestry is the new terms and conditions required by the Ministry of Forests for the application, processing and grant of licence. The requirement to possess certain plant or machinery, to be able to qualify for a licence to log cripples the resource owners and pushes them on the margins of the industry.

I will urge the honourable Minister to look into this matter and eliminate the bureaucracy and people who are behind this ruthless move to weed out the landowners from the forestry sector and do remember, nothing about us is without us.

Sir, the pine and mahogany industries have their own share of troubles in the forestry sector beginning with the ownership of the two industries. Originally, at the time the two industries were

established and landowners were asked to provide the land, they were assured by the then governments that the ownership of the two industries would be gradually transferred to the resource owners. With the reforms and imposition of super decrees, that is now a distant dream.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government boasts of a boom and justifies that bonus payment to the employees of even those business entities maintained by itself, which are not making profits. The bonus payments to the Fiji Forest Industries was just another stunt to hoodwink the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our forest parks and natural reserves are not only part of our heritage and recreational areas but also valuable assets of the State to preserve the large variety of flora and fauna. Unfortunately, the ability for the Ministry of Forests is due to lack of capacity-building and funding is failing to secure these areas from the threat of encroachment by corporate interests. These parks and reserves are also under threat from environmental degradation and pollution, and needs mitigation before they are permanently damaged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reforestation is perhaps another important area in the forestry sector. It ties up with the challenge of planting the four million trees under the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) Initiative. While we all welcome this project, let there be no doubt that it will not be a success until the Government modifies its policies and programmes to benefit and involve the landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, nature, it is said, has a soul. It has eyes, ears and feelings and it knows when those to whom it has submitted to be its custodians are suffering and not happy, nature will not assist in the process of rehabilitation. That is why, despite so much funding, work, research and effort, every initiative undertaken by this Government involving natural resources is a failure, and it will continue to fail until and unless the Government learns to honour and respect the landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on one man's ego supported by the other 26 MPs and the few warming their seats under their protection, is not worth anything, if the lives of the people and the security of the State is at risk. There should be no compromise with our national interest, as has been the case in the last one decade, at the whims of dictatorship. Our ailing and fragile financial position is a direct result of this charade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that the Minister for Economy and Attorney-General continues to boast about the unprecedented economic growth by the Bainimarama Government in the last 12 years.

Sir, economic growth for an ordinary Fijian in the villages or settlements is not measured by the increase of GDP growth but by indicators such as availability of employment opportunities, a decent wage rate, low cost of living, improved service delivery by Government agencies, reliable health services, a quality education that is responsive to enable the labour market and the informal sector. There is also a lack of low level of confidence by the private sector to continue investment merely due to the inconsistencies of policies which limit employment opportunities for our labour force and the reality is that, more and more Fijians are facing hardships to meet the needs of everyday life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has deteriorated in its moral standards that is encouraged by prevailing policies of this Government that does not recognise the importance and value of mankind as God's creation. People and owners of Fiji must be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no Government has ever ridiculed, questioned and humiliated in the manner in which this Government, its leadership, policies and program have been in the last past decade. There are some very good reasons, how and why it came to this scale of Opposition. The reasons are:

- i) De-establishing the SDL Labour Multiparty Government in 2006;
- ii) Compromising the independence of those bodies which are critical to accountability, transparency, maintenance of law and order and in securing the rights of the people;
- iii) Diluting indigenous rights and our traditional, customary institutions and structures, making us powerless in our own homeland;
- iv) Displacing a universally acclaimed 1997 Constitution with an imposed and divisive 2013 Constitution;
- v) Creating and widening economic disparity and unfeasible development of economic sectors;
- vi) Burdening the people of Fiji with more credit and public debt topped up with high interest rates;
- vii) Stagnant economic growth and consumption-driven;
- viii) Less purchasing power for our people and despite the myth and a hype of a decade of unprecedented economic growth;
- ix) Holding public finances at ransom by over-taxation, over-regulation and over-spending creating the dependency syndrome;
- x) Failing miserably to expand our existing industries or establish new industries to create enough jobs for our labour force;
- xi) Curtailing workers' rights, the right to collective bargaining and freedom of expression;
- xii) Allowing gross exploitation of our natural resources and pristine environment;
- xiii) Not disclosing the vital statistics to the public on regular basis to analyse the true and correct state of our national economy and affairs of our nation;
- xiv) Rampant abuse of powers, cases of nepotism, claims of misuse of funds and assets and leadership lacking the will to remedy the situation beginning with taking those responsible to task;
- xv) Lacking compassion for the less fortunate during *TC Winston*, some of whom still live in makeshift sheds and others sharing in other peoples' homes;
- xvi) Worsening public infrastructure camouflaged by the main national highways decorated with street lights; and
- xvii) Total failure insofar as to unite our people and protect our places of worship or people from home invasion, substance abuse, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) and HIV threats.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today the image and repute of this Government is dented so badly at home and abroad and going still worse by the tirade against it in the social media that hardly anyone trusts a word of what they utter except themselves, and the depleting support base they have now. It is all signs and symptoms of policy paralysis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Budget Address delivered by the honourable Minister for Economy tagged with a slogan as alluded to in the House that is the question, Boom for whom?

Much have been said about this non-caring Budget which:

- 1) line the pockets of the rich;
- 2) does not care for the poor; and
- 3) is wasting our hard-earned money.

Sir, to me this is a cruel Budget where happiness will not find you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our policy is to manage. Also I wish to highlight the following issues which require action in the Financial Year 2019 – 2020:

- 1) Completing the *TC Winston* rehabilitation works on the Heritage Residential Buildings in *Levuka* Town;
- 2) Completing the *TC Winston* school rehabilitation works on *Koro* and *Qamea* Islands;
- 3) Completing the *TC Winston* housing rehabilitation works on villages on *Ovalau*, *Koro* and *Qamea* Islands;
- 4) Providing proper jetties and infrastructures for the harvesting of pine on *Lakeba*, *Cicia*, *Gau* and *Ovalau* Islands;
- 5) Implementing community development projects as submitted by the Divisional Commissioners of the four Divisions;
- 6) Completing the \$3 million Reticulation Piped Water Supply Project for the ten villages on the Island of *Moturiki*.
- 7) The construction and repair of Jetties on the islands in the maritime areas.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget fails to give the shot that was necessary to revive and boost the Fiji economy to attract investments, create jobs, empower our people, reduce disparity, instil the confidence of our people in our nation and withhold the very nature of capitals we have at our own disposal, which we are likely to other countries now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been elected here in this House not to be held hostage to the whims of this Government and the slurs and abuses by the honourable Minister for Economy in his diatribe to the Opposition. We are here by the will of the people to articulate alternative ideologies and assist the Government via bipartisan approach to govern this nation effectively.

Unfortunately, the honourable Minister for Economy is always the leading spokesman and the biggest blockade in this collective approach feeling appercart of ambitions and ego built over the years of dictatorship threatened. No wonder he chooses every opportunity he has at his disposal to drive the wedge between the Government and the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is time after having miserably failed our national economy, I call upon the Minister for Economy to admit his failures and lies. He has led his Government to lose its moral authority to govern and made our economy fragile and vulnerable to exploitation and plunder. There is no way to salvation of Fiji's economy under the current honourable Minister for Economy.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly oppose the Appropriation Bill 2019-2020.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, honourable Speaker, Sir. The honourable Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Members of Parliament. *Namaste* and *bula vinaka* to you all.

I rise today to give my contribution towards the 2019-2020 National Budget. First and foremost, I wish to take this opportunity to personally thank the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his hardworking team at the Ministry of Economy, in particular, for this responsible and commendable Budget for this fiscal year.

Special mentioned must be made to the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy, for their foresight and love for the people of our nation and this was accurately reflected in the 2019-2020 Budget.

It gives me immense pleasure and privilege to highlight some of the key components that this Budget offers to all our fellow Fijians. A Boom in resource development with new innovation and investor confidence has created huge job opportunities for men and women who can earn a living and provide for their family needs. But first, honourable Speaker, Sir, I have addressed certain comments by the Opposition, in particular the honourable Biman Prasad.

First of all, in his speech earlier, the honourable Prasad did exactly as predicted by the honourable Maharaj, he hid under the table.

(Laughter)

The honourable Leader of Opposition in his speech said, and I quote, “I will now continue to use the term “the people of Fiji” rather than “the Fijian people”. That is a clear message, honourable Speaker, Sir, a clear and a sad message that we are not all Fijians. But, no Member of NFP is there to challenge that. But, honourable Speaker, Sir, they never challenged SODELPA.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- The Honourable Opposition Leader also went on to say, and I quote:

“There has been too much emphasis on the sugar industry rather than trying to strike a balance with non-sugar agriculture”, and added later on, “There is a deliberate move by the Bainimarama-led Government, to undermine opportunities in non-sugar agricultural to support and improve the standard of living of resources owners.”

In making this statement, Mr. Speaker Sir, he puts an ethnic twist to it. Again, honourable Prasad and his National Federation Party sat quietly, do they agree that we should put less emphasis on the sugar industry?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Do they agree that we should put less emphasis on the sugar industry? I hope not. He thanked them for their statements showing that he endorsed them. The honourable Prasad claims that his team with the honourable Rabuka does not exist but NFPs actions speak louder than words. During the 2018 Elections the NFP did not once challenge SODELPA to a debate, why? They did not once speak out against the SODELPA. Why? Why did they agree with SODELPA policies?

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- They held joint press conferences with SODELPA, honourable Speaker, then they come to Parliament and said that they are not a team. That, Mr. Speaker Sir, is a classic example of cognitive dishonesty.

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- They are beginning to believe everything they say and quite honestly, it is sad. Maybe they need some boom washing powder to clean up their act but today the packet is empty, and empty vessels make more sound, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the people of Fiji are all just wondering why after all these years does the Honourable Opposition continue its campaign of difference and hate.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Please stop it. Every person around us is our brother and sister, please stop this.

Moving on Mr. Speaker Sir, this Budget is good for every single Fijian and our children and it must have taken a big effort to prepare, considering all dimensions. I must commend the efforts by our Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, the honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum in presenting such a balanced budget with enormous opportunities for growth and development for all our fellow Fijians. Indeed Mr. Speaker Sir, this Budget speaks volumes about the FijiFirst Government's efforts and commitment towards sustainability of natural and human resource development.

Realistically, it is important that all aspects of Fiji's national development are sustainable, inclusive, resilient and low carbon considering the fact that FijiFirst Government is on the frontline of the global campaign in our efforts towards tackling climate change and its implications. I seriously feel that this budget has been prepared on the basis of high intelligence, equity and vision and does not have much space and opportunity for members of the Opposition and even the general public to criticise.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I have been travelling throughout the country after the Budget Announcement and I was overwhelmed by the fact that wherever I went, the people I met were happy with the 2019-2020 Budget that was presented. It was evident that the public at large was satisfied with the commitment by the FijiFirst Government. There were numerous rumours with negative connotations about the recent Budget prior to the announcement that was spreading faster than fake news about Kadavu being sold.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- However, it was a different story altogether when the Budget was tabled. People were full of smiles with new hopes and aspirations towards a more secure future for themselves and their children. That has been one of the major commitments of the FijiFirst Government that believes in a true democracy, transparency and equality without any form discrimination such as gender colour and ethnicity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Do not worry Kadavu is safe under FijiFirst Government.

And it is this faith held by every Fijian provided through a vast array of political, civil and social economic rights enshrined in our Constitution. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 Budget has revealed the Government's commitment towards a bright and secure future for all. I believe there has been prudent and disciplined financial decisions made to ensure that we achieve our balance in terms of expenditures and revenues and investments in strong relationships with development partners along with the extreme climate vulnerabilities we face.

The FijiFirst Government has always invested in our people by caring for those who are vulnerable, by building resilience to worsening climate impacts, empowering the disadvantaged to lift themselves out of poverty and giving all people a fair shot at success in our economy. There are tremendous efforts being made by the FijiFirst Government in looking after our oceans and the protection of our marine resources. We would like to have our oceans free from nuclear testing, illegal mining, overfishing, industrial dumping and of course plastic pollution.

Our people depend on the sea and the provisions in the Budget, honourable Speaker, Sir, and we will definitely ensure that our oceans and sandy beaches are clean from household and industrial garbage and our reefs are full of fish. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am very pleased to discover that the Government has allocated \$400,000 for construction of rest rooms along highways, a basic necessity that no previous Government and I repeat, no previous Government was able to accomplish.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I believe that we all travel to the West, either for family commitments or business-related matters and quite often, you want to have a small break but there are no rest rooms apart from the ones available in the major towns. But now, we all can stop over for a break and refresh ourselves before continuing with our journey.

Road and infrastructure development and upgrade has always been a commitment for this Government. We also realise that we have been facing traffic-related issues in major towns and the Suva-Nausori corridor, especially, at peak times. The allocation of \$70,000 towards the development of centralised bus stands in Nasinu-Nakasi corridors will increase bus services within the areas, thus, providing a greater convenience, efficiency and will reduce our carbon footprint.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, speaking of economic realities, the Government through its incentives and proactive measures will be able to collect FJ\$3 billion in tax revenue. This is what I refer to as prudent and disciplined financial decision making. I wonder how many valuable millions of dollars we must have lost under weak and inconsistent policies in the past. This is something we really need to ponder on. The efforts by Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) in consultation with Government agencies collected millions of dollars that has boosted our economy even further.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I want to state that Government is looking to set up a committee to urgently evaluate business processes within FRCS. This very well shows that Government recognises that there needs to be improvements and Government is already moving to improve things. Honourable Speaker, Sir, this Government is humble enough to change things.

The 2019-2020 Budget is 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 builds strong and stable Fijian families, responsibility, integrity, accountability, foresight and the sense of duty and care for our fellow Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is a Budget that empowers Fijian families, laying out new and better economic opportunities for every family member 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, honourable Speaker, Sir, this is a Budget that will bring every Fijian family more prosperity, not only here and now but for years and decades to come.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- As a Member of this august Parliament, I therefore, appeal to all honourable Members to join hands together by disseminating this Budget message honestly and truthfully to our people and to be genuine in taking our nation forward. Let us work responsibly as Members of Parliament for the betterment of our people. Therefore, honourable Speaker, Sir, I fully support this Budget and may the good Lord bless us and bless our beloved nation. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I go on to the debate proper, I would just like to provide some form of rebuttal, firstly to my good friend the honourable Viam Pillay. I would just like to inform the honourable Member that the causes of NCDs are lifestyle and genetics.

HON. V. PILLAY.- How come people on the farm have died.

HON. DR. RATU A. LALABALAVU.- All right...

(Laughter)

HON. V. PILLAY.- If you farm you have to sweat.

HON. DR. RATU A. LALABALAVU.-Scientifically, proven the honourable Minister for Health can tell you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. RATU A. LALABALAVU.- Secondly, I would just like to remind honourable Rohit Sharma not to run down NFP unless he has a bitter or personal score to settle. I believe he had applied to be an NFP candidate but what transpired I believe is between him and the NFP.

Nevertheless Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament I rise to give my contribution on the debate of the 2019-2020 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I give my full support and endorse the sentiments expressed by the honourable Leader of the Opposition in suggesting alternatives to this Budget. It is a clear indication that the Opposition is equipped as the Government-in-waiting to make Fiji free again. As I review the Budget presented by the honourable Minister for Economy and the alternate given by the Opposition, I am convinced that the 2019-2020 Government Budget lacks vision, smart strategies and is spun to appease and suit the corporate interests making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The Budget response by the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, provides a sense of direction and purpose, practical policies and programmes, smart and prudent financial management plans, visionary and hope for real growth to rejuvenate the nation suffering from political oppression and now on economic depression.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a prelude to my shadow portfolio, I will begin by quoting the former Minister for Health and Medical Services who is now the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts. She is on record saying, during the Budget debate last year that it was a progressive Budget for the Ministry of Health. A reduction of \$34 million in the Health and Medical Services budget is not a progressive budget this year when it negates every ideal and principle pertaining to efficient and effective medical services for the well-being of the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would begin on a positive note with the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services under whose able leadership we have been able to secure our established staff personnel salary increment in this Budget. That is warmly welcomed and it a boost to the medical professionals.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, salary increment is not only the medium to improve performance and output for our medical personnel, when they labour hard under trying and testing circumstances and let me list a few of those:

- Working with equipment scarcity and maintenance of those equipment for full use capacity;
- Lack of funding and resources for public health awareness;
- Appalling health infrastructure; and
- Paucity of modern facilities for research and development

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the GP Scheme is well received with the General Practitioners as their expertise under this scheme will contribute immensely to the extra hand for help in health services in the semi-urban and rural health care facilities. I believe this scheme will help relieve the massive load of our work with our medical officers, and at a cost saving to the Government. However, only a few GP's are benefitting. Majority of our GP's in Fiji are members of the Fiji College of General Practitioners, and it is only fair that Government engage with the FCGP for facilitation so that this scheme is beneficial to all GPs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to touch the issue of Public Private Partnership (PPP) as highlighted by the honourable Minister for Economy in his Budget Speech. An allocation of approximately \$53.4 million with the Lautoka and Ba hospitals PPP which is supposed to be planned for June or July this

year, but I believe as the honourable Tikoduadua has stated most likely in 2020. I have always had reservations with regards to public private partnership, and for good reasons, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The above partnership with ASPEN is awarded a 23 year contract, and the big question is what if this PPP goes out?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Australia the recent warnings by reputed international academics that Governments considering healthcare private public partnership take cognition of the recent saga at Northern Beaches Hospitals between the New South Wales Government and Healthscope.

A AUD\$600 million facilities was officially opened on 19th November, 2018 with a \$2.2 billion 20 year contract, billed as the flagship project of the New South Wales government to be handed over to the private sector delivery of a wide range of public service inter-alia healthcare.

The Chief Executive Officer resigned two days after the official opening amidst claims of critical shortage of staff, medicine and supplies. Elective surgery was cancelled due to staff shortage, basic supplies (syringes, needles, intravenous lines, medical swabs, saline bags, wash cloths, rubbing alcohol and maternity pads). Inadequate nursing staff and a large number of locum nurses were reported. Medical interns were allocated 60 patients each, whilst junior medical officers worked up to six hours overtime daily, usually unpaid. One doctor worked 110 hours in a week. This healthcare establishment, private public partnership, is costing taxpayers twice as much the Government announcement of \$1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, though by comparing our PPP to that of the PPP, New South Wales in Australia, may have different baseline similarities but the risk is the same throughout, and also highlighted as this is not the first case of such PPP failures in Australia.

Port Macquarie Base Hospital cost \$6 million then a public hospital of similar size in the 1990s. The South Australian government was forced to buy back the hospital at great taxpayers cost; 13 years later, within the 20 years contract period. The Victorian government eventually bought back the Mildura Base Hospital, the last privately run hospital under PPP. This is five of them, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Australian Productivity Commission (2009) reports that the efficiency of public and private hospitals is similar nation-wide. The independent McKell Institute reported similar findings, noting the disconcerting trend of private enterprise picking the most profitable services to run, leaving the public sector to run costlier, less profitable and with onerous work. The private operators capture more profits whilst leaving government and taxpayers with more risk and costs.

It is widely believe that the maximization of profits by a private investor taking over a public hospital will adversely affect the patients for whom the hospital should provide free services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I thank the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services for his timely and decisive intervention which led to the improvement in services being given to patients at the CWM Hospital in Suva and Navua Hospital, as stated by our honourable Leader during the previous sitting.

With that accomplishment, Sir, I urge the honourable Minister to display the same zeal and adopt the “take the bull by horn” approach in respect of improving services in the same way “take the bull by the horn” approach in respect with improving services to other divisional, sub-divisional hospital, health centres and nursing stations where people are suffering at times from poor services being meted out to

them in terms of availability of resources, scarcity of space, doing work with bare minimum facilities and equipment.

My second point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the reduction in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services Budget. Let me put it in its proper and logical perspective. With a bigger budget at its disposal, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services was not able to address its core function effectively and addressed outstanding issues from last year. What is the guarantee or rationale that it will be able to address those issues with the new ones with a reduced budget in the new financial year?

The reduction of the Ministry's budget from \$384.3 million to \$349.8 million in the 2019-2020 budget, a reduction of \$34.5 million, is a big fall, taking into account the need to provide better services. The reduction of \$3.7 million in operating expenditure means that adjustments has to be made but it should not be at the expense of the people of Fiji. The reduction of capital expenditure by \$27.7 million is substantial taking into account the dilapidated state of health facilities in the country.

The substantial reduction in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will take our health services back some years. At the end of the day, only the poorer and those in rural health will suffer more while the few rich with access to private facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a fair share of capital budget is under requisition (R). In the last three years, funds under "R" were never utilised. The reasons why funds were not utilised maybe due to:

- i) Government not being able to generate the estimated revenue to finance the capital budget.
- ii) Capital allocation was not used when available because tenders may not have been called and dealt with in time.
- iii) Capital not undertaken at all taken half-heartedly and left pending.
- iv) Facing problems with procurement for capital purchase and construction and other related matters.

Whatever the case maybe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will only add to the burden and miseries of the sick and the diseased as well as the health of medic-personals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Community Health Workers play a vital role in maintaining good health at the grassroots level, and is one of the most important activities of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. However, it is disappointing to note that even for this critical year, the area of the budget has been slashed from \$4.5 million last year to \$2.5 million this year. What does the \$2 million decrease mean? Does it mean that we will have less community health workers or will they be paid less than the \$200/month allowance, which in most cases are usually late by months? It further closes the door on the recruitment of new community workers.

The next important area which I intend to speak on is Public Health where the budget cut needs further explanation. In this respect, the allocation has been brought down from \$13.5 million last year to \$7.9 million this year.

On public health, Mr. Speaker, Sir, deals with Communicable (CD's), Non-Communicable Disease (NCD's) and others. Can the government explain the following in view of this matter:

- i) What is the rationale used to reduce the budget for public health?
- ii) What areas of public health will be streamed down to make the budget feasible?

- iii) How is the government intending to address the issue of budget shortfall given the rising cases of NCDs, CDs, HIV and AIDS, TB and other public health issues?
- iv) Is there a contingency plan in place or what are the plans to put in a contingency plan?
- v) Is this allocation being made as an austere measure to test whether the public health can effectively manage itself with a limited budget so as to cut down on expenditure in the future given the imminent economic decline of Fiji under the leadership of this government?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another area of importance is the Ministry's Health Care and Medical Services, which is the Free Medicine Scheme, one of the key vote catcher initiatives in the 2014 election. The people of Fiji have a number of issues pertaining to this matter and it is Government's 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 short of what is required for logistical integrity.

Last but not the least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will touch very briefly on shortages of supply of medicinal drugs, maintenance of x-ray machines, scan machines, lab machines and equipment, perishables, dengue and leptospirosis test kit and other related items. The paucity of funds, lack of will, failure to procure these basic items on time and procuring expired items as well as not maintaining and upgrading machines and equipment over the years, has resulted into a backlog of issues in this area affecting the people who need it the most. This must be noted that in some cases the unavailability of these important items can be detrimental to the lives of patients.

I urge the honourable Minister for Health to also look into the status of the upgrades of the Lautoka Hospital operating theatres and x-ray department which has been two years concurrently now without budget estimates. Currently, they have five operating theatres but one is working, four are under maintenance and the x-ray department urgently needs attention in terms of equipment and necessary upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to turn to some of the issues affecting my constituency. It is a long list of issues which has been brought to my attention by the people. Due to time constraints, I will only highlight the crucial ones here, all for this debate.

On water supply, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I spoke about water in my maiden speech and I am still speaking about it now because it is still an ongoing issue. With the reduction of budget, what does this mean for rural water supplies? Last year's budget was more but still with unfulfilled promises of incomplete water tank supplies. While we are grateful for continuous water carting to affected areas, there needs to be a permanent solution. People cannot afford to live on Band Aid solutions when it is a basic necessity of life and the right of all individuals.

With regards to roads, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) budget for this year has been reduced again. Already with a big budget last year, there were still poor road conditions. With the reduction, it will have an impact on maintenance and work in Taveuni mainly down the South. They have informed me that it was only after seven months that the road there was upgraded. To them it was unprecedented. Also, not to forget the poor road maintenance in Napuka – Loa and also to the Wailevu Road to Tunuloa. What will their expectations be with regards to road maintenance now that the budget for FRA has been reduced?

On communication and transportation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two important and basic tools for effective economic development and generating social growth. I urge the Government to please look into this issue with regards to the North.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the post-*TC Winston* rehabilitation such as Home for Care initiative, it is still incomplete for many registered and are still awaiting. Two primary schools namely in Qamea, students are still learning in makeshift classrooms and churches. The Government is trying to create an impression here that all works related to post-*TC Winston* rehabilitation exercise is complete, when the fact is otherwise.

I wish to plead with the Government for and on behalf of the victims of the *TC Winston* to move into these areas, complete the rehabilitation works and empower our people to return to their lives of normalcy. Three years on, people are still wondering and waiting for help. No Government has taken so long to rehabilitate our people from a natural disaster for such a long span of time. I must also point out on the same note that by delaying the development works, you are depriving and discriminating our people and robbing them of equal opportunity.

Rural electrification, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is another pressing matter for my people as in other parts of Fiji. While I thank the Government for taking action on some of the rural electrification projects in Taveuni such as solar and hydro power, recently I have been informed lately that the hydro in Muana in Tunuloa is now operational, and I thank the Government for that. But yet requests continue to be brought up in *tikina* meetings request for solar power.

Tourism in Taveuni along the bay areas of Cakaudrove East still have the potential for a bigger contribution to the economy, but these areas of tourism has somehow at times been neglected and as termed by a well-known tourist operator in Taveuni, Taveuni is the forgotten paradise. A good number of hotels in Taveuni have closed due to financial reasons, and now some current ones are up for sale and one of the main reason is the current tax demand is making it hard for them to run their business.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not oppose this budget for the sake of opposing it or oppositional rhetoric. We have a duty and a sacred responsibility, and as the loyal opposition of the people of Fiji, we are not going to shy away from that duty and responsibility.

The boom is only in utopia, a drama in which this Government has been excelling since day one, that all is well in Fiji when everything is going to doom. The Ministry of Health budget, in summary, is that although it has been reduced, the only positive is the increase in allocation for established staff, and all others reduced. The increase in salary alone, if not accommodated with all other relevant parameters to produce a conducive and productive environment to work in, is baseless.

Doctors and medical personnel should also be better equipped, better resourced to work in better hospitals, Subdivisional Hospitals, Health Centres, Nursing Stations and also paying their APA on time, to empower them to carry out their duties with the best of their abilities because the people of Fiji only deserve the best.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the Duke of Wellington who defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo said: "Promote this man, who knows how to defend a hopeless situation." This was the story of a soldier, who was charged for looting before the swine squealed from inside his haversack after the Duke had issued orders for looting, and the penalty of looting was death. The Government was trying to defend a hopeless situation after hearing the soldiers' explanation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not support the motion that is before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development, the honourable Jale Sigarara. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. SIGARARA.-Honourable Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; *bula re* and a very good afternoon.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank the leadership of the FijiFirst Government by the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications for bringing home the National Budget.

Allow me to join my colleagues, who have spoken before me in congratulating the honourable Minister for Economy and his team for the very comprehensive Budget they have designed for the 2019–2020 financial year.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as a Christian, I was ashamed at the honourable Leader of the Opposition's opening remarks. Yes, I said it, someone had to. Maybe, some honourable Members on the other side skipped a few classes during Bible studies, but the Bible I read teaches me different things from what they are preaching.

Love is what my Bible taught me. I would like to assure every single true Christian and every single Fijian, regardless of their ethnicity, that Christianity is about love and we will continue to fight the false prophets, who spread hate and lies.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, in his speech, complained that the honourable Attorney-General should stop making attacks against him. And then throughout his whole speech, he made non-stop personal attacks against the honourable Attorney-General. The hypocrisy is unbelievable.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to urge the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to take heed of his second-in-command, Honourable Tabuya's words earlier and please, use love as the universal binding tool. Honourable Tabuya says one thing, SODELPA and NFP do the other, so how can we trust anything that you say.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will now try my best to educate the other side and I hope that for once they will listen when they are promoting the washing powder.

(Laughter)

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this Budget is the most widely consulted budget that this country has ever had and is based on "Securing our nation and a Sustainable Future". The Budget supports development that recognises and meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In every sense of the word, the FijiFirst Government is committed to driving development that is consultative and takes heed of the plight of the people in the rural sector, who for the most part, are often neglected in the drive towards economic development.

As you are well aware, honourable Speaker, Sir, it is those in our rural sector who are often resource rich but cash poor. These are the very same areas that provide food security and income for our rural dwellers.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am in full support of the 2019-2020 National Budget. This is a Budget that fully espouses and supports Fiji's commitments to sustainable development through climate action, environmental protection and ocean preservation. These are the very fundamentals that Fiji's rural development efforts are built upon, a development that sustains and does not compromise but conserves the environment.

A sustainable future for our beloved nation allows each and every one to take action and to make better decisions on issues that affect our environment and our lives.

The Budget recognises the remoteness of our rural areas and has seen fit to continue with budgetary allocations within the sectors, such as health, education, fisheries, forestry, agriculture, infrastructure and transport to support the growth of our rural sectors.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will primarily focus on the budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. The 2019-2020 Budget provides a sum of \$18.6 million in the 2018-2019 Financial year. The Capital to Operating Budgetary ratio for 2019- 2020 is 42:54 percent. The remaining 4 percent covers the VAT component.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the allocation for the Divisional Development Projects (DDPs) or Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) has increased by \$655,000. The increase in the PSIP budget is attributed to the construction of additional two Government Stations and District Offices.

Projects that will be funded in 2019-2020 Budget, include:

- 1) Wainikoro Government Station (Northern Division);
- 2) Kubulau Government Station (Northern Division);
- 3) Korolevu District Office (Western Division) ;
- 4) Namarai District Office (Western Division);
- 5) Kavala District Office (Eastern Division); and
- 6) Vanuabalavu District Office (Eastern Division).

These projects continue to be proposed through the Development Forums of the Tikina and Provincial Councils, the District Advisory Councils, the Provincial Development Boards and the Divisional Development Boards.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, a budgetary allocation of \$640,030 has been allocated for the District Advisory Council (DAC) monthly allowance and administrative expenses. The budgetary allocation recognises the important roles that DAC members play in constituencies and districts they serve.

The DAC members work with the communities and other relevant stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of development programmes to uplift the living standard of the rural

communities, while at the same time assisting District Officers and Provincial Administrators in the identification, implementation and monitoring of the Ministry's projects, and highlighting the developmental needs and concerns of the communities to the relevant Government stakeholders and through forums, such as the District Advisory Council Meetings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government Services Expos or Roadshows continue to be part of the Government's efforts to maximise awareness of its services in the rural areas. It continues to be a popular programme and it is an opportunity for Government, stakeholders and the private sector to increase their reach and improve service delivery to the rural and remote communities.

The Budget for the Government Services Expo is maintained at \$200,000. Two Government Services Expos have already been conducted in the current financial year. The first was held in Keiyasi, Navosa, while the second was held at Vaturova, Saqani, Cakaudrove.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the Government Services Expos, two other programmes that have been aimed at primarily enhancing the provision of services to the people are the Community Capacity Building (CCB) Programme and consultation and promotions.

The CCB is intended to allow communities to take ownership of planning and be directly responsible for their own development. It provides opportunities for empowering rural communities and allows local leadership for development efforts. The Ministry has been provided a total of \$100,000 to implement the CCB Programme.

The Ministry has allocated a total of \$80,000 for consultation and promotion activities. The Budget will ensure that policies on rural development will be widely and thoroughly consulted, to ensure that it encapsulates the challenges and the opportunities available to further rural development programmes and activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years, the Ministry continues to be provided with a budget for institutional strengthening. The budget allocation of \$160,000 has been allocated for the 2019-2020 financial year. The programme is crucial in ensuring that our officers are provided with the adequate resources to be able to better serve members of our rural communities.

My Ministry's capital programmes for assistance to the rural and maritime areas has a total allocation of \$3.8 million, including the construction and upgrade of community access roads, footpaths, footbridges, with an allocation of \$2 million and a grant of \$1.5 million for Self-Help Projects and \$300,000 for the provision of emergency water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the grant to self-help is intended to promote and assist rural dwellers in the construction of basic amenities and other small projects. It is the most widely used form of assistance where communities are encouraged to initiate their socio-economic sustainable development projects on a cost-sharing basis and instill a sense of ownership over these incentives. The Ministry has, over the years, increased its focus on assisting economic projects aimed at generating income for our citizens.

Community access roads, footpaths and footbridges allocation is focussed on the construction and upgrade of community access roads, footpaths and footbridges, to improve access within communities. The Programme is aimed at providing ease of access to farmers and link them to the main accessways, to ensure that they are able to transport their produce to the market efficiently.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are normal government programmes aimed at empowering citizens and the communities to become self-sufficient and to participate in the economy. The emergency water allocation on the other hand is aimed at supporting communities with the provision of water during periods of drought and dry spells.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the budgetary allocation to rural development over the years is a fact of Government's commitment to addressing the needs of the rural communities, to ensuring that they do not remain disadvantaged or denied access to opportunities.

On that note, honourable Speaker, Sir, I fully support the 2019-2020 Budget. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution today. I now call upon// the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Members of the Cabinet, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members. Sir, I would like to respond to the National Budget of 2019-2020 which was presented by the learned Attorney-General and honourable Minister for Economy on Friday, 17th June, 2019. Sir, the general observation that I have, there is no doubt that the people of Fiji always look forward to the annual budget because it will affect them, either directly or indirectly, and some in a bigger way, particularly, the poor, and in a smaller way to some extent, big businesses.

Basically, I agree with the observations made by the honourable Member of the Opposition, Sir, who had spoken before me that the 2019-2020 Budget is a deceptive and desperate Budget. It is a doomed budget rather than a boom budget, as claimed by the honourable Minister for Economy and there is no confidence by the private sector and investors to invest in the country.

Sir, I am saddened to learn from the 2019-2020 Budget that the real financial status of the country is in dire straits despite the claim by the FijiFirst Government that everything is good. Despite the advice given by our experts and professionals, from our multilateral development partners, the Government continues to be bullished. Bullished in its expenditure with no consideration of our vulnerability and the challenges faced by small, narrow-based economy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, only a couple of days ago at the Construction Industry Conference, the Governor of RBF admitted that the world's economy is affecting Fiji more than ever before because all of Fiji's major trading partners and economies are expected to slow down as was indicated by the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs. The statement by the Governor of RBF clearly confirms that the chickens have come home to roost.

Sir, with a reduction of \$800 million in the 2019-2020 Budget, from the 2018-2019 Budget of \$4.7 billion, I believe it is not sufficient and not well thought out. It is not well thought out because cuts are not well targeted. The cut will make people worse off than before. Sir, my intention will focus more on food security which directly have an impact on the Ministry of Fijian Affairs which I have been allocated as its Shadow Minister.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- There is no such Ministry.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.-You listen honourable Member, I will get there. It will be clearer to you.

I would like to enlighten this august House on some vital statistics of the importance of food security particularly on agriculture. It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that only an additional \$800,000 has been allocated to non-sugar agriculture while the sugar industry budget increases by \$2.1 million from \$68.3 million in the 2018-2019 Revised Estimates which went to \$78.4 million in the 2019-2020 Budget.

In terms of demographic distribution of our population, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is interesting to note that our population increased from 751,375 in 1986 to 884,887 in 2017, an increase of 24 percent. In terms of distribution, the urban population increased from 39 percent in 1986 to 56 percent in the 2017 Census whilst the rural population decreased to 44 percent in 2017 compared to 61 percent in 1986.

Sir, in terms of agriculture contribution to GDP, it continues on a declining trend. In 1995 agriculture contributed 16 percent of our GDP. In 2007, this reduced further to 10 percent and today it is around 4.5 percent of GDP. It is anticipated that it will continue to decline further. These figures were brought from the Budget Supplement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I understand what the honourable Minister for Agriculture had stated that he is saying a different thing from what they put in the Budget Supplement. So I do not know who to believe here, but you are not pulling figures out of the air, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir the incidence of poverty continues to increase. Today about approximately 30 percent of our population are living below the poverty line and another 20 percent are facing hardship despite the claim that the GDP is buoyant. The truth is that the poor are getting poorer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we import approximately 40 percent of our food products despite the favourable condition for the revitalisation of the agricultural sector.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Listen. The vital statistics I just highlighted clearly suggests, honourable Minister for Agriculture, that Government must change its policy mix and consider food security as an urgent priority.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has made a commitment to achieve this Sustainable Development Goal and the first two goals focuses on no poverty and zero hunger. These goals impinged on our food security policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Sir, I was quite fortunate to be part of your delegation to China with the honourable Members of this august House last week namely the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, the honourable Minister for Education, the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua and not forgetting your hardworking staff, Mr. Senitieli Wainiu and myself included. It was interesting, Sir, that we were briefed on the Belt and Road Initiative by the Chinese officials. The initiative is a global development strategy adopted by the Chinese Government involving infrastructure development and investments in 152 countries and international organisations in Asia, Europe, Africa, Middle East and the Americas. “Belt”, Mr. Speaker, Sir, refers to the overland routes for road and rail transportation called the “Silk Road Economic Belt” whereas “road” refers to the sea routes or the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It was known as the “One Belt One Road (OBOR) and the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road until 2016 when the Chinese Government considered the emphasis on the word “one” was prone to misinterpretation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Chinese Government calls the initiatives a “bid to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future.” Some observers see it as a push for Chinese dominance in global affairs with a China-centered trading network. The project has a targeted completion date of 2049. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the initiative’s ultimate aim is to ensure food security in China.

In the early 1970s, Mr. Speaker, Sir, China normally imported around 45 percent of its food products. It has learnt a lesson that to ensure sustainable growth, it must also embrace food security. Although the scale will be different from China, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are important lessons to be learnt that we must also address issues related to food security.

The way forward for Fiji, Sir, is to take a phased approach, honourable Minister, in moving away slowly from subsistence farming to mixed farming and to a more commercial farming through well-developed mechanism programmes, better research and development and a robust marketing for our local products which are in demand both in the international and domestic markets. We must have the support service in place before we reach the commercial level. And this was one of the emphasis of honourable Bulanauca’s motion in the last sitting and it was fully supported by the experienced again by honourable Tikoduadua in trying to be able to make the link before you jump to commercial farming.

This approach will encourage an incentivise resource owners to better utilise arable land available to them. Along this line, may I suggest we revive (I would like to strongly suggest this to the honourable Prime Minister and the Government of the day) the Department of Co-operatives to encourage communities to establish co-operatives to once again revive the cooperative movement which works well with our communal land ownership of 90 percent of land being owned by native Fijians. This suits our communities well because the risk is low and the fact that we do not have the capital.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Every member of the co-operative, (Honourable Minister, listen for a minute), receives shares at the end of the year depending on how much they produce and sell.

This side of the House, we are not really criticising you, Sir, we are offering suggestions as well. We would like to suggest strengthening the support mechanisms for co-operatives with training for member’s book-keeping and financial management. This used to be done in the past. This is where we are lacking; lack all this knowledge to take us through in managing the yield that we get. That is the thing that is missing, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Yes, we did. Co-operative was very much there. All I am trying to suggest here is to revive it because it will be a win-win investment for the Government and the nation. In particular, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for indigenous communities who have the tradition of *solesolevaki*. This was mooted by the honourable Prime Minister when he went on the COP23; the *solesolevaki*, *talanoa* – it is all part and parcel of this. Given the dynamic in the change of the demographic of our population and our dependency on narrow based agricultural products, the Government should consider its priorities, most importantly to address the increasing incidence of poverty, Sir.

I now turn to the Auditor-General’s Report on Expenditures, Sir. I hope, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the funds allocated in the 2019-2020 Budget for the agricultural sector for food security will not be

diverted or be underutilised. This reminds me, Mr. Speaker, of the Auditor-General's Report in the last few years, clearly highlighting some of the challenges in the implementation of Government's initiative. This includes, one, the lack of capacity within ministries. Sir, one of the key reasons why there is always under-expenditure is the substantial amount in the Budget under Requisition to Incur Expenditure (RIE).

The hands of the line Ministers who have been assigned ministerial responsibility to manage his/her portfolio and budgetary allocation are tied and when they wish to utilise capital grants and funds for capital expenditure because funds are under RIE. This means that the Minister for Economy has to give the final approval.

In the 2018-2019 Budget, however, \$4.65 billion for expenditure, 46.24 percent or \$2.150 billion was under RIE; 20 percent of the total allocation for the Social Services sector was under RIE; 60 percent for Economic Services; and 89 percent for the Infrastructure budget; and 50 percent of the Unallocable sector, was also under RIE.

Although the amount on the RIE has been reduced to 39 percent in the 2019-2020 Budget, it is still too high. Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore only 61 percent is available to government agencies without seeking the Minister for Economy's approval. These funds are only dedicated to operating costs.

The breakdown, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of funds under RIE in the 2019-2020 Budget are as follows:

- i) 18 percent of funds for General Administration;
- ii) 16 percent of Social Services allocation;
- iii) 60 percent of Economic Services.

My understanding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that funds are only placed under RIE if all necessary requirements for implementation have not been completed or complied with. The increase of allocations under RIE is a sign of poor planning, poor budgeting and the misuse of centralisation of authority in one person who is trying to control everything. It is a sign of megalomania.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we notice that productive investment, particularly in the resource-based sector continues to decline, and this must be addressed because investment provides employment opportunities and improved livelihoods of ordinary citizens, particularly the poor.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I, in concluding, reiterate once more that the Budget announcement should bring confidence, hope, progress, unity and prosperity for our people.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the 2019/2020 Budget is full of self-praising, political rhetoric, with very little attention and articulation on details of expenditure, revenue measures and incentives. The reduction of around \$800 million or 70 percent of expenditure will not provide us the fiscal space to further reduce debt portfolio. There is a great risk that we will go into the vicious cycle as we continue to borrow or raise green or blue bonds, whether it is bond or loan, they will all have to be repaid.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not support the 2019/2020 Appropriation Bill. Thank you.

(Acclamtion)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, I have just been informed that there is no water on the premises at the moment, so for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) reasons, we are going to adjourn now for afternoon tea and we will play it by ear from there. So enjoy your afternoon tea while you can.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.11 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I apologise for the interruption in the debate this afternoon due to unforeseen circumstances with the water pipe being broken on the other side, and they have to cut the water supply to the whole of Parliament. That only delays our work but we will continue.

Welcome - Ambassador of Argentina to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Hugo Javier Gobbi

Honourable Members, I would like to welcome and acknowledge the presence in the House this afternoon of the Ambassador of Argentina to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Hugo Javier Gobbi, and he is accompanied by the delegation: Mr. Alfredo Amigorena, the Vice President of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Edgar Flores Tiravanti, Political and Cultural Affairs of the Embassy of Argentina; I was not given the name of the lady, but I welcome you most warmly on behalf of the House.

(Acclamation)

I trust that your time in the Parliament will be rewarding and enjoyable. Welcome to Parliament and welcome to Fiji.

Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate, and I give the floor to the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, the honourable Ashneel Sudhakar. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, to our guests in the gallery and to the people of Fiji who are watching these proceedings through various forms of media, be it through live television, on the *Walesi* platform or through internet livestream: I take this opportunity, honourable Speaker, to thank this august House for availing this time for me to present my contribution to the 2019 – 2020 Budget. Therefore, I stand before you today in my capacity as the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver my speech in the areas I have responsibilities for.

Honourable Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his team for giving us the 2019 – 2020 Budget, a Budget with the vision to protect the wellbeing of our future generations; furthermore, a Budget that will continuously drive climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives for sustainable development. This Budget, if it is objectively identified and analysed, it strives to strike the right balance between both economic and environmental sustainability; a Budget which addresses all critical aspects of a vibrant, growing and sustainable economy. As I had mentioned in my media interviews and I will say it again, “It is a responsible and intelligent Budget.”

But, honourable Speaker, Sir, before I elaborate on why it is a responsible and intelligent Budget, I would like to address some unfortunate statements from the other side. Firstly, honourable Biman Prasad used the term “cognitive dissonance” in his speech. SODELPA and NFP indeed suffer from this condition. They brought a box of detergent to Parliament and thought it was funny, that is cognitive dissonance, Mr. Speaker. Fijians especially youths are laughing at their lame joke. Yet they still continue with this cheap public relations stunt. Honourable Nawaikula should fire his media team first before he looks to this side of the House.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, when I walked into the Parliament yesterday, and I saw these packets of washing powder on their desk. I thought I had walked into a laundry. But then I realised that what they were doing because they have so much dirty linen in their closets they need that washing powder to wash it.

(Laughter)

In fact, the former Member of Parliament, Dr Mere Samisoni is doing that for you in the media anyway for the past 2 months, washing their dirty laundry using the same packet of Boom.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- I was minded to bring my own brand of washing powder, Mr. Speaker, which is Tide, to remind them that Tide has changed and the Tide is in favour of this team now. This is no longer 1987, this is not 1990, this is not 2000, this is 2019, we are in power and the Tide is on this side.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- In fact, honourable Speaker, the Opposition has failed at many times over the last few years and the last few decades. The honourable Biman Prasad and honourable Sitiveni Rabuka both boldly proclaim that after the 2018 polls they will be on this side of the House. A failed prediction! Fail!

They fail to make an alternative budget. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an alternative budget requires a lot more thinking than one sentence written on honourable Niko Nawaikula's paper.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The Opposition fails to think, fails to produce solutions. The Opposition fails to attend the budget workshop which they asked for. Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka of course is well versed with failure since 1987, and that list will take up the whole day to read. And now they can add to their list of failures, the inability to make a joke that is actually funny.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I sincerely wish honourable Sitiveni Rabuka and the honourable Biman Prasad have spent their training time developing a counter or alternative budget instead of spending that week coming out with this Boom detergent campaign. They once again made a mockery of this august Parliament.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people of Fiji are lucky, in fact the people of Fiji are counting their lucky stars that we are in power. Every smart and patriotic Fijian is now breathing a sigh of relief...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Every Fijian is breathing a sigh of relief that this side of the House is in government. Why Mr. Speaker, Sir? Because while they spend their time coming up with weird jokes, we build roads, we build hospitals, we build jetties.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.-While they laugh at cheap stunts, we are out helping Fijians. This Budget is rightly called the Bainimarama Boom. The Bainimarama Boom made a sound so loud that the Opposition was stunned, and was not able to understand what is happening around them. The Boom made the Opposition lose their mind and bring a box of detergent into this Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

You should use Boom too!

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Opposition in his address had mentioned that he is worried about the future of his children, his grand-children and his great grand-children.

He says that he is a great grand-father now and there is nothing in the Budget to address his issues.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is this side of the House, it is this side of the Government that is worried about his children, his grand-children and his great grand-children than anybody else. In fact, we are aware of everybody's children and their great grand-children because we are bringing in policies that does not only look after the present generation, it will ensure a bright future for everybody for the coming generations.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- If one looks at the type of comments that has been coming around from the other side, one will realise why is it so dangerous to even consider them as an alternative Government.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Kuridrani yesterday in his address had a racial undertone to his speech when he compared and tried to bring in race in the agriculture sector. He tried to state that the Government is favouring one agriculture sector which is sugar because more than one ethnic group is dependent on that. A total racial line. Honourable Salote Radrodro did not leave any stones unturned, and did not leave anything to the imagination. She made a direct attack on the Government's TELS and Toppers Scholarship Programmes, and said that they favour only one community and it is the disadvantage to the indigenous community.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- She is trying to bring back race-based policies, the raced-based scholarship that had plagued this country since Independence. It only took the *Bainimarama* Government to bring a fairer system which goes on merit; merit honourable Radrodro.

Mr. Speaker, we are going by merit. Let me ask her a question. If she goes to the hospital would she want to be seen with the best doctor who qualified on merit, with good grades or someone who was given the preference because he came from a particular province or particular race? I know she knows the answer but she would not say it here.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Mr. Speaker, the level of bigotry that is being displayed by the honourable Members of the Opposition is actually very sickening and it is appalling. Honourable Bulanauca yesterday in his speech blamed the honourable Prime Minister for the death of the CRW soldiers. He in his statement has said, "How can such a person lead a government who had ordered the killing of the CRW soldiers". I challenge the honourable Bulanauca to make that statement outside this Parliament.

HON. MEMBER.- See the fun.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- And see the fun, outside this Parliament, when he would be subject to court actions.

Mr. Speaker, it seems that the honourable Bulanauca is only worried about the lives and the families of the CRW soldiers. What about the other RFMF loyal soldiers who lost their lives fighting the CRW soldiers? What about the lives of the families of the loyal soldiers of the RFMF? No one talks about them.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- It is again a challenge to the honourable Bulanauca, please if you have the evidence come outside of the privileges of this House and make the statement outside.

What is more appalling Mr. Speaker is that the honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa who used to be the Education Minister in one government made a comment which I found very funny that parents should not be buying smart phones for their children. Here a government is trying bring technology to the students, to the classrooms and she is saying remove the technology. I hope the young people, the youths, the students are listening to this and they will listen to her. Here we are trying to bring knowledge to you, bring technology to you, and she is saying to take it away from you.

In the same line and the second breath she says, where are the laptops? So she wants to take the mobile phones and then worried about the laptops. It is a total convoluted argument. I do not know who is writing their speeches maybe those lawyers from Butt Street who are writing their speeches cannot get the coordination right.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Where is the laptop?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Mr. Speaker, the Budget is remarkable since it was achieved by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy against the backdrop of a strong and global economy and moderating activity in the domestic economy. Even with no VAT or income tax increase our Government is projecting a \$3 billion tax revenue.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- To maintain ten consecutive years of economic growth is not an easy task. At this juncture, I would like to remind the Opposition parties that the honourable Minister for Economy has emphasised this time and again the economy of the nation is beyond politics. When the Opposition and their pet academics makes unsubstantiated claims about the economy, and spread rumours to further their political agendas, they do not only hurt the economy they also cause a dent to the prospects of each and every Fijian.

Before the Budget was announced some of the political parties and their supporters took to social media and started spreading rumours that there will be a liquidity crisis, that there will be a devaluation of the Fijian dollar, that VAT will increase to 15 percent, that income tax will increase and there is no money left in the country and many other fake stories. Furthermore, I have got some examples here Mr. Speaker. One of the NFP prime supporters, a businessman from Ba also some religious body posted on his *Facebook* and said and I quote, "I have strong feelings that most likely we will have an increase in VAT from 9 percent to 15 percent given the current status of our economy, hash tag Fiji economy". Negative comment.

Another person who is a pro-SODELPA supporter on his *Facebook* profile on 26th May wrote, "Regime lies about liquidity exposed, interesting to see that ANZ oscillating a year isolating on its position on liquidity, no money equals devaluation equals increase in VAT to 15 percent that is what you get for voting for FPF folks". These are the types of nonsense they post on social media to damage the economy without realising the damaging effect it has on every individuals in this country.

Honourable Speaker, such irresponsible statements by these individuals cause panic among the people, prompting them to make rash decisions which again damages the economy and hurts the stomach of our people. These people who voted for them, as a result of which they occupy the very few seats on the other side of the House, deserve to hear the truth and not fake news.

The Fiji Institute of Accountants in their post-budget press release has commended the Budget as a well thought out and well planned Budget. The Budget deficit had been reduced from 3.4 percent to 2.7 percent. This has been done without increasing VAT, Corporate Taxes and Pay as You Earn (PAYE). Keeping VAT at reduced rate of 9 percent and income threshold of \$30,000 means ordinary Fijians will once again benefit from a lot of this Budget.

What they have been saying all along that this Budget got nothing for the poor people is actually a myth. This fact alone demonstrates that this Budget has got a lot more from the poor of this country. Businesses will continue to enjoy the low tax rate, yet for another year, as there is no increase in company tax rates. In addition, there is now a full 100 percent tax deduction for employers FNPF contribution. Furthermore, losses carried forward will be extended to eight years from the current four years, and export income deduction will be re-introduced at 50 percent.

This move should silence those unscrupulous business supporters and financiers of the Opposition parties who have been involved in fear mongering and antigovernment rhetoric that this Government is anti-business. The ANZ research, in its publication *Pacific Insight on Fiji Budget* predicts that a Budget surplus is achievable by the middle of the next decade, which will allow the Government to further pay down debt and further reduce the debt to GDP ratio.

With the growth forecast of 2.7 percent in the 2019-2020 Budget, and the move to focus on fiscal consolidation, the Ministry for Lands and Mineral resources is looking into strengthening polices that address the resilient progress in the changing climate and environment for both local and global markets. ANZ is especially pleased with Government's strategy to return to potential surplus over a number of years. This is good news for every sector, the economy and for the people.

Furthermore, in combating the effects of climate change and as alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister, emphasising that we must remain adherent to our zero tolerance policy for a development that comes at the overall cost to our natural environment. As the initiative by the Ministry, we are working on finalising the implementation of the river gravel and sand extraction management guideline, which will further enforce upholding of license conditions and penalise operators who deliberately ignore environment policies. The guideline is based on the following principles:

- a) ensure prudent utilisation of natural resources, gravel and sand extraction in order to derive the real value for money;
- b) promote efficient and effective management of our natural resources; and
- c) effectively monitor gravel and sand extraction through monthly monitoring and awareness.

Moreover, the Ministry monitors sand and gravel extraction and is thankful to the budgetary allocation of \$130,000 that has been granted for the next financial year. We will work to the best of our ability to minimise illegal activities in sand and gravel extraction. In addition, the Ministry has formulated a debt management policy that will address the collection of overdue and current land rentals and inform its lessees of responsibilities on outstanding taxes.

The Ministry will also target the top defaulters in our lease, especially those who make great profits without caring to pay their land rental while breaching the lease conditions. I also caution those who owe us rental arrears to pay as soon as possible to continue to enjoy their leases. Such payments will contribute to revenue and build a more self-reliant economy and to fund developments that will meet our citizen's needs.

The Ministry endeavours to work smarter using the existing network and collaborations with other Government Ministries in areas which are common targets to us. The Ministry will work to complement other Government agencies in areas like ground water development, digitalisation of Government information and sustainability development in regards to building a protective climate change resilient Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources has been allocated a total sum of \$29.6 million. This allocation will drive the Ministry to execute its spending with great efficiency and accountability. The level of service rendered by the Ministry will improve which will be achieved by staff multitasking and skill development. The allocated budget will allow the Ministry to be more productive with potential to earn more revenue for the Government.

Honourable Speaker, some of the pertinent features of the Ministry's budget are as follows:

Ground water development: The Ministry has been allocated \$600,000 for ground water assessment and development in smaller islands, and \$1.5 million allocated for large islands.

I would also like to acknowledge the budget allocated to the Ministry in the last financial years for the procurement of multi-rigged drills. This will further enable the Ministry to increase the number

of boreholes drilled in large and small islands increase the number of communities and population benefiting from rural groundwater resources.

The Ministry will also ensure that the water reticulation process is completed in the process of groundwater development. For the past two financial years, a total number of 3,001 people have benefitted from this programme. In this financial year alone, 14 groundwater assessments and investigations had been conducted for small islands and 63 for large islands; seven groundwater drilling exercises for small islands and eight for large islands; and one reticulation project for smaller islands and seven for the large islands.

Mineral Development; the mineral investigation projects have been allocated \$300,000 to assess potential mineral sites in Fiji. For the past three financial years, a total of nine prospects was assessed. In 2016-2017 the areas assessed were Sawani, Navosa for gold; Korotogo, Navosa for gold, silver, zinc, copper and lead; Somosomo, Nadroga for copper, lead and zinc.

In 2017-2018, areas assessed were Nasivi in Tavua for gold and silver; Vunimoli in Labasa for gold and copper; and Delaikoro in Labasa for gold and copper.

In 2018-2019, the areas that were assessed were Ruwailevu in Navosa for gold and copper; Matailobau in Naitasiri for gold and copper; and in the Ba Delta for iron, gold and copper.

The Ministry will be able to achieve its target, since the targeted areas for 2019-2020 are all located in the Eastern and North-Eastern parts of Vanua Levu.

Earthquake and Tsunami Monitoring (Disaster Management); Honourable Speaker, it is crucial that the Government also prioritises the enhancement of Fiji's Seismological Network by having the appropriate and updated seismic equipment and upgraded systems with an allocation of \$660,000. With the 24/7 Earthquake and Tsunami Monitoring Network in full operation, this allocation will allow for timely dissemination of alert messages, as public safety is paramount.

Most developments around the country exist along the coastline of towns and cities, likewise there are many villages along the coastline. Furthermore, all the major business hubs of the country are located along the coast, and their financial and investment security should be safeguarded with resilient infrastructure and disaster management strategies. Therefore, it is only prudent that the current Observatory at Department of Mineral Resources be compatible with the global early warning systems.

Land Bank Initiative; Honourable Speaker, at the outset, a major setback concerning some of our landowners today is the lack of financial gains from their land. The development of *iTaukei* Land under the Land Bank has been allocated \$1.5 million, to ensure that the interests of landowners are realised through the development of designated land to its highest and best economic value.

This allocation under the Land Bank has been utilised to fund development of residential lots of which 77 are prepared in Legalega and 25 in Yako. Apart from this, honourable Speaker, we have developed a Land Management System of the State land where lease renewals will be processed at a quicker time and raising the value for the leases that we are issuing.

In conclusion, honourable Speaker, with the overall Budget allocated to the Ministry, I will ensure that in the 2019-2020 financial year, there will be a close collaboration with other Ministries and

stakeholders, whose roles are closely aligned to our core functions. We will, therefore, strengthen our networks and establish forums to ensure close coordination in the implementation of the projects.

Once again, honourable Speaker, I am pleased to support this 2019-2020 Budget and I thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for this Budget. Once again, I plead with the Honourable Members of the Opposition please, do not hurt the economy for your political gains because that will hurt the stomachs of our people. With that, I hope they use the Boom washing powder for better use this time. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the honourable Mikaele Leawere. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers and honourable Members of this august House; before I proceed further into my response, let me just respond to the honourable Minister for Lands as to what he had said.

I would like to go back to the honourable Minister for Infrastructure's words in this Parliament where he alluded hogwash, after hearing that from him and he, sort of, meandered a bit and had forgotten what he has to say, especially when we want to know what is his role is in the new facility for the Indian High Commission. That is what we want to hear in this House.

(Laughter)

There is no mention of that...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for his Budget Address. Although the contents of which is arguable and will be the subject of my speech in the next 20 minutes.

Sir, I also wish to express my gratitude to the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his response to the Budget Address. I fully agree and endorse the points raised by him and am of the view that they need serious consideration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before going deeper into the debate proper, may I join this House to congratulate our National Sevens Team for their unprecedented series of victories. They have, as always, made us proud again. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the \$5,000 given to each of the team members is peanuts, compared to the economic benefits they have contributed to the economy and I hope that the honourable Minister for Sports will rectify this in terms of what the players have done for this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I get into the debate proper, let me join all honourable Members of this House to pay my tribute to past Governments and the leadership of this nation for their visionary policies and programmes, and the tremendous contributions that they have made, to make this country what it is

today. All these cheap talk demonising past Governments and leadership is nothing but simply undermining their contributions, which is an insult to our history and intelligence of the people of this nation.

Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not a decade old nation, as this Government would like us to believe. Our history goes beyond the military *coup* of 2006, and we are proud of who we were and what we had achieved in that era upon which this nation is now sustained with the hard work of our ordinary citizens, not this Government whose genesis lies in the hijack of the democratic process in 2006.

Analysing this Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was no difficult task. It is apparent from this Budget that our economy is in trouble because:

- 1) we have a Government that, in its quest for political power, has taken a cheap ride at the expense of national interest, State coffers and, thereby, grossly compromising the economic development and future of this nation.
- 2) we have had a Government in the last one decade which went on an unparalleled spending extravaganza, burdening this nation and its people, as well as our future generations with a high public debt level. It is an irresponsible financial management and the Budget is a load of hogwash, a term often used by the honourable Minister for Infrastructure.
- 3) we believe the data to project a ‘feel good’ factor with a growing GDP, not reflecting the real improvement in the lives of our people.
- 4) there is limited scope and space for freedom of expression and gross lack of the impetus for investor confidence.
- 5) this Budget creates the usual hype that they had been doing in the last one decade, but the reality is that, there is nothing for the ordinary people, apart from robbing the poor Peters and to pay the rich Pauls.
- 6) this is a copycat Budget, heavily borrowed and designed on varying and contradicting budgeting models around the world and from our past Governments, and yet unable to make contextual and contemporary application. What a failure, Mr. Speaker, Sir!
- 7) we have a Government in the last one decade which lived on borrowed money, purchased propaganda, politics of fear and diversion. This is a reckless Government and they are the biggest abusers of taxpayers’ money in the last four years, and the people of Fiji must rise up to the fact that we are on a path of economic ruin. We are living, Mr. Speaker, Sir, beyond our means.

Sir, I will confine most of my contribution to labour relations issues emanating from the Civil Service reforms, pressing need for labour reforms and our quest to groom a productive labour force as well as on employment opportunities and the third review of the National Minimum Wage rate.

The Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Labour Relations was allocated \$13.2 million in 2018 and \$15.9 million in 2019. In this Budget, that allocation has been slashed to \$12.9 million. In other words, the allocation for this Ministry is reduced in this Budget, a little over \$3 million, which is a decrease of 18.78 percent.

What this reduction means to the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Labour Relations in terms of its day to day administration and operation, which can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The Labour Department will continue to work under difficult circumstances without any upgrading to deal with complaints in employment issues. There will be loss of jobs according to reduction in personal emoluments. The honourable Minister needs to come out clean on the future of the workers in the Ministry.
- 2) The Occupational Health and Safety issues at workplace will continue as usual, given the lack of funding to monitor and enforce the improvement of the impending health and safety issues.
- 3) The Employment Tribunal and Mediation Services will continue to suffer from backlog of cases.
- 4) There will still be no major consultation on labour reforms, despite concerns at home and from abroad.
- 5) No major policies or programmes changes are expected to improve the lives of those affected by the National Employment Centre. Teachers on this scheme, we have been told, suffer because they have not received financial assistance for some time and some of them have been sent back to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a need to have trained OHS with appropriate qualifications to administer the OHS courses and inspection at workplaces. Additionally, there are still many workplaces, particularly those managed by the foreign firms where OHS compliance and standards are highly questionable, putting the health and lives of our workers at risk. It is important that this matter be attended to with immediate effect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition is totally disappointed at no mention of labour reforms by the Government in this Budget. We wish to remind this House once again of the following issues of facts pertaining to labour reforms or rather the need for the same. These are that:

- 1) The Employment Relations (Promulgation) Decree 2009 was a resultant of the extensive consultations between the SDL Government, employers and the unions. We regard it as one of the best labour relations arrangement achieved by key stakeholders in the employment and industrial relations sector.
- 2) No sooner when the then interim Regime realised the democratic ideals and principles that piece of legislation espoused and the scope of freedom of expression, the then Employment Relations (Promulgation) Decree 2009 was amended to suit the agenda of the Bainimarama dictatorship.
- 3) Apart from the amendments carried out to the Employment Relations legislation, the then interim Regime went on a step further in imposing the Essential Industries Decree, Public Service Decree, Public Order Decree and then entrenching a number of super draconian Decrees in the 2013 Constitution. That has not only limited but basically eliminated any scope for the existence of worker rights and right to collective bargaining.

- 4) Following the mounting pressure from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the FijiFirst Government carried out editorial changes to the Employment Relations Act to appease ILO but, in fact, there has been no major substantial changes as desired either by the ILO or the workers of Fiji. To make it worse, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the public sector unions, we are now haunted additionally by the Civil Service reforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) has divided and created simmering tensions within the Civil Service, as people who have years of experience, wealth of training and development under several Governments have been pushed to the margins of the Service and have been demoted to do menial work. This has had a perilous effect on the performance and morale of the Civil Service.

As if that is not enough, the variance in salary band and hassle the civil servants faced with regard to payment of their appropriate salaries has proved to be a hurdle. It has hurt our civil servants and their families badly and weakened their purchasing power, so much so that some of our hard working civil servants who had given much to the nation, tendered their constructive resignation to either join the private sector or migrate for greener pastures abroad.

Digging deeper into the Civil Service reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House must note that there has been no consultation whatsoever between the stakeholders on the matrix for promotion and demotion or the processes involved. There have been issues pertaining to imposed contracts, replacing previous tenure agreements which were negotiated by way of collective bargaining. The OMRS, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has encouraged a new degree of discrimination and nepotism unseen in the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give examples of how the OMRS issues, hiving off from the Civil Service reform is taking its toll upon our civil servants and the morale of the Public Service. In one case in the old category, an ED2C Officer was posted to an ED6D level school. When the decision was reviewed by the court of law, the Ministry of Education was compelled to reverse the decision.

Yet, in another incident very lately, Sir, as the civil servants planned a nationwide protest against the Civil Service reforms, the Executives of several unions among which the Fijian Teachers Association (FTA) were main targets. Now, what we gather is that some of these Executives are actually summoned to the Ministry of Education, grilled on their role in the proposed protest.

Our Union Executives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are now forced to face the music by being summoned to the Ministry Headquarters, to be questioned as to why they had decided to go on strike on 3rd May. We are in the month of June and yet we are still going on a witch-hunt. This has got to stop! Still on education and rehabilitation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, schools in Qamea are still in tents. Can the honourable Minister rectify this and please note because we have just received confirmation about this.

On the productivity charter, though noble and timely, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not a new concept but again a build-up on the work of the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) Government which devised the first charter in the country in 2005 in partnership and consultation with the employers federation and trade unions. It is therefore our hope that the charter as proposed in this Budget will be a product of partnership between employers and their representatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on job creation, maybe one of the most pressing challenges in Fiji and we are glad that every stakeholder in nation building recognises the importance of the same. Sir, there are some key elements of job creation which needs to be outlined in its proper perspective before the House.

First and foremost, a nation needs three essential ingredients for investment which are sound leadership, feasible economic policies with a clearly defined direction and objective and impetus for investment by the creation and maintenance of investor friendly atmosphere.

Secondly, appropriate infrastructure development such as roads, water, electricity and access to services and proximity to ports of entry as well as transportation and communications remain the most vital components of attracting investments in any one part of the country. Unfortunately, selected developments have marred this aspect of investor confidence.

Just to cite a few examples, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have witnessed how this Government has in its populist stride declared Korovou to Matawalu as tax free where no major industry or new industry has taken shape to create the much needed jobs in Tailevu, Ra, Tavua and Ba areas.

As opposed to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, keeping up with expansion of the greater Suva area, the Government could have easily given the same tax free status to areas like Sawani to Serea, Nausori to Korovou and Suva to Navua as well as Sigatoka to Lautoka given the existing industries, scope for new industrial development and the necessary infrastructure available in these areas for good investment models.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the limited budget that we have now at the disposal for youth training and development as well as the paucity of funds is badly needed to finance initiatives and achieve the aims and objects of the National Employment Centre (NEC). This will worsen the plight of job seekers and the rate of unemployment in the imminent future. With \$850,000 allocated to Fiji Volunteer Scheme (FVS), how do you divide that with \$30 a week contribution, unless the Ministry increases that amount?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the Opposition welcomes the third review of the National Minimum Wage rate, we have a number of issues pertaining to the review which are as follows:

- The Review Committee needs to widely consult. Consult the International Labour Organisation and the views of the workers and the workers' representatives in this country.
- The cost of living which is really taxing the lives of the people in this country needs to be considered.
- SODELPA advocated the National Minimum Wage Rate of \$4 per hour. We still advocate that amount and believe that this will at its best keep our families sustained given the current and projected cost of living adjustments.
- It is very easy to regulate a minimum wage rate for the formal sector workers but there are a large section of people who are involved in the informal sector and that is where the crunch is.
- The Government must be aware of how the wage rate affects poverty levels in the economy and the correlation between the two issues. In our case, the wage levels of our people have not increased over the years with the cost of living and what is more appalling is how the previous minimum wage rate was arrived at \$2.32 an hour and then upgraded to \$2.68 an hour.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) Foundation students, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will not be considered for the National Toppers Scheme because of the quality of the programme is not the same quality as the Year 13 apprentices. This is a discriminatory and flawed basis of excluding a group of deserving Fijian students.

Globally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the quality of education is assessed by an internationally-recognised accreditation agency. Fijian parents who can afford to send their children to USP do so, in order for their kids to be exposed to the university teaching and learning environment. Year 13 does not provide them with that opportunity.

It is a bad move to exclude intelligent and hardworking children from being considered in the National Toppers Scholarship. It is discriminatory. I urge the honourable Minister to get a specialised international accreditation agency to review the Year 13 Programme before making statements regarding quality versus equivalent programmes like USP Foundation Study.

The honourable Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir, contravenes Sustainable Development Goal 4, when he announced that the USP Pacific TAFE students not to be given TELS.

As I always bring to this House the good wishes of people of Serua and ask the Government to work in the interests of the nation, we call on them to resign and call for a fresh elections. While it is a good experience by some villages along the Queen's Road who have drainage works done before the elections, there are still many villages awaiting drainage works, road maintenance, rural electrification and water schemes to be implemented or completed.

Forestry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, lies in the heart of our people given the forest resources we have in the province including commercial based mahogany plantations. That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the resource owners demand that the mahogany legislation forcibly imposed by the Bainimarama dictatorship be reviewed and reverted back to its former self so that the landowners can gradually own their plantations and access its benefits.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House and the people of Fiji need to know that the reforms in the Mahogany Industry resulted in the closure of the Sustainable Forest Industries at Rovadrau, Navua which was a source of employment for hundreds of people. The reforms were a costly affair to the employees and their families who in fact made the ultimate sacrifice for the reforms.

As if that was not enough, two other sawmills in the province at Navutu and Waivunu lay idle and await the outcome of the reforms whether to commence operations or close down. The fact that these mills again employed a number of people from the locality has hit the people hard in terms of job losses.

The other issue arising out of the forestry sector which concerns the landowners and other parts of Fiji engaged in this resource based sector, is the new terms and conditions for application, processing and the granting of license for logging. The new terms and conditions basically cripple the landowners due to lack of plant and machinery on their part to obtain license to log and further opens up the doorway for corporate interests to move into our lands and to log and employ our people under conditions befitting modern day slavery in our own homeland.

The last issue on which I wish to make a brief comment is the Film Industry. This is regarding the security firm engaged by the company filming the movie *Loveland* in Fiji. The said security firm is not living up to the local labour and OHS standards insofar as treating its workers in this respect. This matter needs to be investigated.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from what has been said in this House from the Opposition Members, this Budget has failed to live up to promises made by the Government to the people of Fiji. In view of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister should consider removing the honourable

Minister for Economy from his current portfolio because he has misled the people of Fiji with deception and lies and placing the economy in a very precarious situation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I oppose Budget 2019-2020 based on the concerns that we have collectively raised as the loyal Opposition of the people of Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. And I now give the floor to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament.

I rise in support of the 2019-2020 National Budget as delivered by the honourable Minister for Economy, and I start off by congratulating him and congratulating his team for a well-constructed Budget and notes that as part of this Budget investment in the national infrastructure is a top priority.

The budget allocated to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport for 2018-2019 was \$165.2 million and for the 2019-2020 Budget, this now stands at \$89.6 million, with a total allocation of \$12.8 million for the Ministry of Disaster Management and Meteorological Services. This Budget is a work smart Budget.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Work smart because it requires brains, it requires innovativeness, it requires a strong team to be able to implement it. It is a Budget to achieve a balance between expenditure, revenue, investment returns, public and private engagements and prioritising long and short term means; prioritising. We have heard already from the Members of this side, and we have talked about it and everybody knows that there is a global slowdown; everyone knows this, IMF talked about it, the World Bank has talked about it, the Reserve Bank talked about it. A lot of those global slowdowns in the past....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- One of the reasons that we have been able to get pass this global slowdowns in the past because they have not affected our major trading partners. This one is, it is affecting the United States of America, it is affecting New Zealand, it is affecting Australia and when that happens, that impacts on us. The impacts of this, we are beginning to see from last year until now and it continues to go on. Things are getting tougher and this Government realises that, so what do you do, we adjust!

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- We adjust what we are doing according to the situation that we find ourselves in.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Let me tell you, when I first came to the Ministry that I am in now, I looked at some of the APA assessments that they did for their staff. I looked at one very senior staff and I said, “What is this guy’s assessment of his performance?” He said, “His assessment was a 113 percent of what he was supposed to achieve”. Then I looked at his budget and asked, “How well did he use his budget? The amount of budget that he used was only 78 percent of the budget that he was supposed to use. So I have 78 percent in the budget; 113 percent performance, how can that be? Something is wrong. It tells us that we need to fix the systems, either the targets are wrong or there is too much fat in the budget.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Listen you might learn something.

(Laughter)

Either the targets are wrong or there is too much fat in this budget. This budget will allow us to eliminate all the fats.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- And it requires a special team to be able to do that and this is the team that will deliver that for the people of this country.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- We have the brains, we have the character, we have the creativity, the innovation to be able to deliver that, so watch and learn. We know that in any organisation or any country, it is not just about looking at people. It is looking at processes and systems, that is why I was appalled, Mr. Speaker, Sir. When the honourable Nawaikula was asked, “what is your alternate budget?” You know what his reply was? “Sack the Minister for Economy, sack the Prime Minister.” His first solution is to blame someone. If you have ever run an organisation in your life, you will know that 80 percent of the problems and 80 percent of the solutions comes from fix the process and fix the system.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is what we are going to do. Look at the picture. I would recommend to the honourable Leader of the Opposition, please take the people that are sitting in the front here, move them to the back.

(Laughter)

Move honourable Tabuya up to the front. You know why? Because honourable Tabuya at least suggested something that is useful, these lot, their alternate budget is absolute, here is new word for you, “bollocks”; absolute bollocks.

(Laughter)

As I was listening to the debate, I might not talk too much about my Ministry today but I was listening to some of the things that the honourable Qereqeretabua asked. She asked, “What is going to be the legacy of this Government?” Let me tell you what the legacy of this Government is going to be.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition asked us to consider the servicemen, the people who give their lives in service of this nation. What has this Government under this leader done for the servicemen of this county? What has he done?

We have had servicemen that have been serving our country in the wars: World War I, World War II, they went to Malaya, they went to Christmas Island, and they got involved in the Aftercare Fund. All the military people who came into government, Prime Ministers, Ministers, they did not do anything until honourable Bainimarama fixed and allowed them to enter into the Aftercare Fund in 2008. No other Government has done that. He looked after the people that are in the service sector, the servicemen.

People used to get injured in Lebanon, no one would have made sure that they got worker’s compensation. No one did that. Members of the military who had been injured or hurt in the Middle East, they began to get a compensation that they needed. That is going to be the legacy of this Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.-Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- We looked after the servicemen of this country. From 2000, the location allowance used to be only \$30. Who changed that? When did it change? It changed under the Bainimarama Government. Despite the fact that we have other Prime Ministers who came from the security services, none of them did that. That is one legacy that we have. We have one other legacy, what do we do? What is the legacy that we have? Other legacies.

I have heard here comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir that this Government does not look after the poor. Bollocks, absolute bollocks, absolute hogwash, absolute rubbish, that is absurd. Today in this country, when a woman becomes pregnant and she is living in a rural area and cannot have access to food, she cannot pay for it, she can get food vouchers that helps her to get good food so that the baby that is growing inside of her becomes a healthy baby because she is eating good food. That has never happened before until this Government came into place.

And when she is about to give birth, and she has no money to look after the baby, government gives her a thousand dollars for that baby, a thousand dollars to help raise that baby up. When the baby is born and when the baby is about to go into primary school, \$500 is available and if they are living at their home, they do not have a lot of economy, they do not have a lot of money, their water and their electricity is subsidised to make sure that they can look after themselves.

When they go to work, they realise now that their taxation threshold has gone up to \$30,000, so, if she is getting \$10,000 or \$12,000, or \$15,000 or \$18,000 to \$25,000, she does not pay a cent of income tax, that is what this Government has done for the people of this country, and that is going to be our legacy.

Now, when people go to early childhood, we are setting up Early Childhood Centres (ECEs) all over the country looking after the young ones of this country. For infant schools, primary schools,

secondary schools, fees are not paid. You do not have to worry about the cost of your bus fare. This Government is paying for the bus fare to make sure that every child in this country gets an education that is going to be the legacy of this particular government.

TEs and Toppers: Earlier on, I heard the honourable Leader of the Opposition said that under his government, they had actually introduced the National Minimum Wage - absolute bollocks, absolute bollocks. Yes, we used to have the Wages Regulation Orders before but the first National Minimum Wage was only introduced under this government.

We had the Wages Regulation Order before, I believe that, I understand that, I know that, the National Minimum Wage, there was nothing looking after the people working as baby sitters, as farmers out in the villages - nothing. It was not until this government came on board that that has happened. So, we have had a lot of all sorts of things that people have been talking about.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about the building of that Back Road in Denarau. He said it costs \$12 million per kilometre that is correct. It did cost about \$12 million per kilometre

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Listen, hold your horse, and hold it tight.

The total of \$12 million is about right, but that is not just for the road, it includes land acquisition, utilities, side road works, lighting, traffic signals, pedestrian controls and landscaping, underground cabling and we looked at how much it costs in Australia.

In Australia, urban roads can be from AUS\$3 million to AUS\$5 million per lane kilometre. So, a four-lane road like the one in Nadi there at Denarau can cost between AUS\$12 million to AUS\$20 million. So, I say once again, absolute bollocks.

The Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu talked about the facts that some of the roads from Labasa to Wainikoro, Saqani, Vaturova meeting Savusavu Road, the work there was only done in the 1990s. I say, "What bollocks, absolute bollocks". From the records that I have here, work has been going on. We have heard of the tarsealing in Wainikoro, Daku Village, Vatuvana Hill, all that work has been carried out.

The honourable Niko Nawaikula has asked, "How are they going to fix the pot holes?" We fix the pot holes by assigning money in the Budget for the pot holes to be fixed, that is how we do it. We have \$74.2 million been provided for renewals and replacement of roads and at the same time, we are taking a stronger, preventative approach to making sure that we do not have pot holes in the first place. It is a proactive and preventative approach so that we can make sure the honourable Members of Parliament on the other side can ride safely on the roads when they go home, whether it is a bus, taxi or one of their limousines, that is fine, that is all going to happen.

The honourable Simone Rasova has asked about jetties in Vunisea and Kavala need upgrading. Earlier on this year, there were repairs already done for Vunisea. I would like the honourable Rasova to know that there is more money available here for Vunisea, and also Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Wainiyabia also in Lakeba, for this year.

Honourable Suliano Matanitobua said they have this lovely water source in Wainadoi, and he said that there was no consultation with the landowners. He said that yesterday. Little does he know, the consultation took place two weeks before that. The consultation has been undertaken and now we are waiting for the consent of the landowners.

The honourable Mosese Bulitavu complained about the fact that we are fining drivers because they are overloaded. Do you know that the road to Vesidrua now is falling apart? Do you know why it is falling apart?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Because overladen trucks cross that road. We have to put a stop to this. If we do not limit the weight that we have on the trucks, it will mean that we will destroy the roads and the bridges that we have in this country. So many of our bridges are under attack because of that.

We have \$67.6 million that is allocated for the upgrade and replacement of bridges. My school mate, housemate and classmate, the honourable Kuridrani has said that the Budget has nothing on the Island of Kadavu, and questioned why three Members of Parliament from Kadavu: honourable O' Connor, honourable Koroilavesau and also me, since I am a Kadavuan, did not influence the architect of the Budget. Come on, bollocks, bollocks.

(Laughter)

In my Ministry alone, I am not talking about Fisheries, Agriculture or Education or Health, my Ministry, one Ministry, the amount of money that we are already spending in Kadavu in the new Budget is \$6.1 million. If we add on all the others, it will be whole lot of money, so the people in Kadavu know this Government, even though they voted for my school mate there, this Government will serve everyone because we serve every single person in this country. We do not distinguish between race, colour, where you are from, whether you voted for us or not, we are here to serve you. You know next time around, when you come to Elections, you know whom to vote for, I think I have exhausted that bit, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- It behoves us to move on.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$248 million is the budget that has been allocated towards improving the accessibility, reliability and sustainability of energy services to all Fijians. We will extend the electric grid, in order to improve the access to electricity to nearly 1,800 households, affecting 9,000 individuals at the cost of \$9.2 million; \$3.2 million will be invested in House-Wiring Initiative for 3,000 households, benefiting 15,000 individuals.

We have not forgotten the victims of the two major destructive cyclones, *Winston* and *Keni*, \$3 million has been allocated to continue the rehabilitation works in areas damaged by these cyclones.

The Ministry is expanding effort and money to the tune of \$5.4 million to install solar home systems benefiting 3,253 homes and 16,000 individuals; \$350,000 will be spent on upgrading the Biofuel Mills at Moala and Matuku. We intend to reduce fossil fuel using Bio-Energy sources by 3 percent by 2022. We intend to present the change in the way we do things and how it impacts the citizens of Fiji.

With these upgrades and transitions towards renewable and sustainable energy sourcing, more families in Fiji will have access to electricity contributing to their participation in the future grid and the blue economies of Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, even with the reduced budget, my Ministry will be able to continue to provide electricity to our planned target of 5,000 homes per year.

Working smart, we have engaged strategies at no additional cost to improve and enhance the conventional and renewable energy sources to complete the ongoing projects of selected committees as promised in previous year's budget initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other essential service to all citizens of Fiji is provisioning of clean water and access to waste water systems. Under the 5-year and 20-year Fiji National Development Plan, approximately 78 percent of Fiji's population has access to a treated and reticulated water supply and 71 percent has access to improved sanitation. The sum of \$807,900 has been provided to the Department of Water to ensure that the Department is able to deliver its services throughout the year and a further \$258.7 million has been allocated to the Water Authority of Fiji.

The Specific Water and Sewerage Project that are part of the 2019-2020 Budget include:

- Approximately 300,000 Fijians shall benefit from the Construction of the 40 Mega Litre New Water Treatment Plant at Viria in Naitasiri;
- Constructions of a 10 Mega Litre Reservoir at Waitolu; and
- Laying of 26 kilometres of Piped Ground;
- \$52 million will be invested on this Project with completion estimated by the year 2021.

Approximately 285,000 Fijians will benefit from the \$30.6 million that has been allocated to improve water quality supply as per the following projects:

- Construction of five Water Treatment Plants - Waiwai in Deuba, Nagado, Vunidawa in Naitasiri, Savusavu, Levuka and Namau ni Balevuto;
- Construction of six New Reservoirs to increase bulk water storage in Nadi Hospital, Lautoka Hospital, Flagas Avenue, Tacirua East, Tauvegavega, Ba and Lolobalavu in Nadi.
- \$25.1 million has been allocated for the Water Distribution Projects, which include Hydrolic Mains Improvement Projects for the Replacement and Duplication of Aged Pipes to reduce water loss. This also includes critical infrastructure upgrades to ensure that the existing water articulation systems meet current water demands;
- \$11.2 million has been allocated for the Rural Water Supply Projects which include the Construction of 32 Rural Water Schemes nationwide to benefit 8,411 people, including villages, hospitals and schools. This includes the maintenance of the APS Systems, Dissemination Plants and Continuing Work of the Rural Boreholes;
- \$5 million has been allocated to continue with the Rain Water Harvesting Programmes where eligible households get 5,000 Litre Water Tanks;
- \$4.1 million has been allocated for Non-Revenue Water Reduction Programmes, including Leak Detection, Pressure Management, Service Pipe Replacement and Air and Boundary Valve

Replacement Programmes with an effort to reduce non-revenue water further to 25 percent by the year 2021;

- \$2 million has been allocated for Major Replacement Programmes;
- \$10.5 million has been allocated for Kinoya Waste Water Treatment Plant Upgrading Works to increase the capacity of the plant and reduce odour benefiting over 220,000 people. This also increases the Design Works for Waste Water Treatment Plant Upgrades of Natabua and Namara to increase Loading Capacity to cater for existing customers and new upcoming subdivisions plan for nearby areas;
- \$2.3 million has been allocated for Emergency Response Contingencies;
- \$8.6 million has been allocated for Electrical Upgrading Projects.

In addition to this, the Ministry is developing an Integrated Water Resource Management Plan as per the Work Smart Initiative. This plan is created to be completed by the year 2021. The responsibility to provide access to transportation for all Fijians is divided between the Fiji Roads Authority, the Land Transport Authority and the Department of Transport at my Ministry. This is through the provision of an efficient and sustainable transport network for the country. Between these agencies:

- \$419 million has been allocated to the Fiji Roads Authority;
- \$26.68 million to LTA; and
- \$2.8 million to the Department of Transport.

These three organisation will work together to plan and use these funds to achieve the overall objectives of the Land Transport sector for Fiji.

To improve standard of existing road networks some of the key highlights of FRA include:

- \$60 million on Maintenance Programmes;
- \$36.1 million on Renewals and Replacement of Existing Roads;
- \$62.4 million on Upgrading and Replacement of Bridges;
- \$1.4 million on Maintenance and Renewals of Jetties;
- \$33.5 million on Construction of Footpaths, Bus Shelters and Signage in Peri-Urban and Urban Areas;
- \$8.7 million on Streetlight Improvement;
- \$26.4 million on Capital Congestion and Capacity Improvements; and
- \$52.3 million to expand and improve the Rural and Maritime Areas Road Network.

\$5 million has been allocated for the Designed and Construction of a Four-Lane Road from Nasoso Junction to Lautoka to improve the travel time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has taken on the initiative to create a comprehensive national approach to road infrastructure issues affecting us all. We wish to reduce, if not eliminate repetitive expenditures and fixing roads in related assets.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Meteorological Services plays an important role in our country. It has been allocated a total Budget of \$12.8 million for the year and of this amount:

- \$8.8 million is for Operating Expenditures;
- \$4 million for Capital;

- \$400,000 for the Purchase of Specialising Equipment for Laucala Weather Forecasting Centre;
- \$138,000 for the Geo-Sustainable Operational Environmental Sector and System Upgrades;
- \$50,000 for Awareness Activities around the DRR Policy;
- \$800,000 for Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Funds;
- \$1.8 million for the Upgrade and Maintenance of Evacuation Centres;
- \$200,000 for Upgrade of Outer Island Stations on Viwa and Udu Point; and
- \$265,000 for the Installation of Water Level and Rainfall Telemetry Equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know I have finished my time, but in conclusion I have not talked about the works components of my Ministry. I wish to thank the honourable Minister for Economy and the Government for the work smart Budget that calls for the three “E’s” of leadership.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Three “E’s” of leadership, and that is what we have. We have Energy. We energise the people that work for us so that they can find new solutions. We have the Edge to make tough decisions and we will Execute on our plans. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER. –Honourable Whip, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I did not want to interrupt the honourable Minister, but I just wish to refer to Standing Orders 62 in terms of a prohibited reference and ask the honourable Ministers as well as Members to refrain from using the word bollocks , as it literally translates an appendage of a man’s body that is actually vulgar. Mr. Speaker, it is not a good example to be set for those that are watching and listening, especially our children, even if is used as a slang its original meaning is an appendage.

(Chorus on interjection)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I find it offensive, Mr. Speaker, under Standing order 62.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Whip, who are you making your Point of Order to?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The honourable Minister who just spoke was using the word bollocks, and I am asking if that could be withdrawn and that the ruling comes from the honourable Speaker, that Members not use that term in the future as it is offensive.

HON. SPEAKER.- Bollocks is permissible. There is nothing wrong with that. There is another word with ‘b’ which is not permitted, and I will not tell you which one it is.

(Laughter)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, I do suggest we use hogwash, it is the same meaning but not as vulgar.

HON. SPEAKER.- It might not sound as nicely as he wants to put it, but it is permissible. There is the other 'b' word. Now where was I?

Honourable Members, I give the floor to the honourable Aseri Radrodoro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I stand to join my colleagues in responding to the Financial Bill No. 7 of 2019. I also join my colleagues in opposing this Bill.

But before I deliberate further into my speech this afternoon, I would just like to request the honourable Minister to inform the House if he was aware of the water cut that just happened.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Or in a proper wording, he must inform the House that there was going to be a water cut. Otherwise all that speeches was an absolutely bollocks.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to begin with my response to the Budget, I would like to reiterate the words of fellow politicians on his descriptions about long term, smart and sustainable budgeting and I quote:

“If you want creativity, take a zero off your Budget. If you want sustainability, take off two zeroes”.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Take all zeroes out.

(Laughter)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I know the honourable Attorney-General is googling his phone now.

In the Fiji scenario, it is much more serious than what can be called a smart and sustainable. It is not one zero. It is not even two zeroes; it is nine zeroes.

As a Chartered Accountant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and an auditor by profession, the \$0.8 billion dollars reduction is definitely something that would warrant my calling for a detailed investigation. This reduction which equate to around 25 percent is confirmation that this side of the House was right all along. Government has been overstating its budget. And in doing so, it has put not only the country at risk, but made every Fijian vulnerable to all kinds of economic and social risks many are not ready for.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, simply put, a Budget must be consistent and realistic. This Budget we have called, have been labelled a “kaboom budget”, a “genderless budget”, “*khali baat* budget”, “*din maro* budget”, “no security for civil service budget”. That is all the labels that has been coming from this side. You need to take notes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Do you know the meaning of *din maro* or not?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Bubbles! Bubbles! Bubbles! Low hanging fruits, bubbles!

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am obligated to point out that in the last four years

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Use the words that you understand.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Bubbles! I responded for the Opposition, I had stated on the repercussions of a possible financial downturn. You were served with ample warning since!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had spoken on the Trump Administration policies impacting the world, and had made reference to similar global occurrences that would impact Fiji. By the way this Budget has been prepared, it looks apparent that Government has been left with no other option but to reduce, there is no other options there. You cannot continue but to reduce, given your blatant disregard for sound advice from the Opposition, your only option was to cut back. The answer to the question whether this Budget is for the people of Fiji? No, absolute no. The question is, then who is it for? The silence means they do not know

(Laughter)

It is for the international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) whose structural adjustment policies are now dictating the way this Government is operating.

Crucially, I had spoken about strongly believing that Government through the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) was not being honest about our real economic worth and had warned of the dangers of such distortions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am on record as saying that the high level of giveaways was unsustainable and done to merit popularity, and votes by the present Government. Now, it has all added up and come at a huge cost to the people of Fiji. The other side has a habit of saying 'until the cows come home'. Well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the cows are now here! Who is going to milk them?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Economy has repeatedly said, along with the honourable Prime Minister that Fiji has been experiencing a major boom in recent years. That statement and claim becomes ridiculous when we are forced to reduce and slash our national budget by \$0.8 billion.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You do not understand it.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The truth of the matter Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very easy for any simple layman to understand.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- No understanding.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- We were spending what we could not afford in the first place. I had stated as well in the last two years Mr. Speaker, Sir,

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You were not a member.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That the revenue collections were not matching the expected expenditures, so we were having shortfalls that would need to be balanced from somewhere. Government assets had to be sold off, never materialised. Revenue forecast for 2019-2019 had been set at \$4.2 billion, but estimated actual revenue collected fall short by \$1 billion at just \$3.2 billion. The budget again this year, highlights the sale of the same asset for \$80 million.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This is what happens when we consistently tell the honourable Attorney General, who is not a qualified finance or development person, that his debt borrowings are extremely unhealthy and high risk. He has always laughed off our submissions, but I know that laugh is hollow now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, with the high debt levels and mandatory debt repayments as demanded by global financial institutions, government has been forced to reduce its investments in the crucial sectors which has been highlighted by the members of this side of the House, which would ideally drive economic growth. That is why we are where we are today. No amount of sugar coating can change that, no amount of bollocks can change that.

The current government has been so irresponsible Mr. Speaker, Sir. They cannot and must not be allowed to get away with blaming global conditions alone. No, they should not! It is their irresponsibility, greed for power and political survival that has brought this very unfortunate situation on the people of Fiji, and each and every one of us will now have to pay for it with expected job losses, and a stagnant if not decreasing growth for the foreseeable future until situations improve. You have to check your Budget book.

The Budget therefore must be simply put in its proper context, that it is a cruel budget.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Cruel in the sense that it will continue to hammer and squeeze the poor and the disadvantaged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am heavily burdened, but for now let me focus on our roads. This year's budget of \$419 million is a reduction of \$144 million, or 26 percent from \$563 million last year. This is a huge reduction, given that there are many of our people still crying for proper roads and bridges in many parts of Fiji.

On the issue of good tarsealed roads, there are many areas around the urban and rural centres that still experience unbelievable travelling challenges.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The people of Koronivia, Lokia Village in Nausori, those in villages around Nakelo, Buretu and Daku in Tailevu, Naluwai to Serea Village in Naitasiri, Ba, Navosa, and those especially in the village of Moala in Nadi, belong to this categories. I ask the honourable Minister for Infrastructure to please get this list sorted in these mentioned areas urgently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has been focusing a lot on streetlights. It is a good thing, anyway. However, we ask for the Sawani – Serea Road to be also looked into. This road services the famous girls' school – Adi Cakobau School. You must be aware of it, honourable Speaker. This road also connects us to the famous Monasavu Dam and the soon to be commissioned Viria Water Pump. Why has there been no streetlights yet? These are basic utilities that powers the Fijian economy. Please, address this urgently by installing streetlights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the upgrading of rural roads, I note that there is no indication of length of roads in association with its budget allocation. For example, the Kiuva – Kaba Peninsula Road, there is an allocation of \$1.7 million for this road. What is this road for? What is this allocation for, and when can we see this road completed? This road, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is well familiar to your good self. It is also the road that used to be used by the honourable Prime Minister, accessing his village where amazing people live.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people of this area have long hosted Fijians at their famous Kiuva – Naselai Beach, and I urge the honourable Minister, whoever it is, the Minister for Economy or Minister for Infrastructure, since the road allocation is under © and it is under a separate head, to get a stretch of road tarsealed whilst at it. The significance of this road, Mr. Speaker, Sir, cannot be understated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that brings me to ask about the strange arrangement that has been mentioned by Government to implement through private new companies to maintain our road networks, the continuation of outsourcing of road networks. How does this system work and why are we giving away crucial infrastructures to be handled by private entities? Who will be accountable for this work?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind Government about the Draubuta Village manmade incident, where the Government had to jump in to assist in the mess created by the FRA contractors. Take heed and do listen to what we are saying, otherwise, we will be again mopping rubbish, same time, this time next year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have noted that the Annual Report of FRA has finally found its way into Parliament with the Auditor-General's opinion on the entity stated to be an unqualified one. In simple terms, it is a clean report. How can the report say that when the deteriorating conditions on our roads throughout Fiji indicates a different picture?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the status of our jetties and bridges suggests that the accountability and transparency processes for these national assets is also compromised and who is really making the decisions of the FRA?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has made many promises to our people. Promises that did not materialise like that of the long overdue rural solar electrification request from Roma Village in Naitasiri. What will happen now to them and others in similar position that the budget for the Ministry has been drastically cut from \$78.49 million to \$24.86 million? That is a 32 percent cut. In the last four years, I had literally begged in this august Chambers that Roma Village be remembered. They have paid their

required deposit and have been sent on numerous wild goose chases from the PM's Office to Energy Fiji Limited, and to the Department of Energy. Similarly for the provision of electricity for the people of *Veiraisi* outside Nadera and those from *Sasawira* and Nabua Muslim League Settlement, also known as *Navasa*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note the reduced allocation to the Land Transport Authority (LTA) from \$28 million to \$23 million in the 2019-2020 Budget. There are a lot of issues that have been raised about the operations of LTA and I would not like to go into detail, but some of the pertinent issues that I would like raise and address is the increase increasing number of vehicles and the Ministry of Defence warning that traffic congestion on our roads is becoming a national threat, especially during emergencies, the e-ticketing issues, the taxi permit issues to taxi lottery issues, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It seems that Government is unable to commit to proper planning.

LTA has been charging \$150 for passengers not carrying a ticket. Likewise, bus drivers are getting charged for \$1,000. Why on earth would you do that when we have places that do not have any place for e-ticket top-up?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the whole point of travelling by bus is because of its availability. These exorbitant fines is downright stealing from our middle to low income earners.

Similarly, we see Police Officers continue to issue TINs around the city and town areas at will, and on highways. The question is, are they robbing from people to pay for their leased vehicles and motorbikes? Do they not have a more real policing work to do - beating the streets and neighbourhood, instead of riding on the new air-conditioned vehicles and booking motorists on our roads unnecessarily? From 2020, we will also see minibuses using e-ticketing. What else is next, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government is not only downright arrogant, but I believe that they have lost all human empathy. No wonder, Mr. Speaker, they could not justify paying the CEO for LTA over \$0.5 million in salary with a reduced budget allocation. They have to rob from the poor to pay Big Sam.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated in the past, I still hold that Government needs to consider the option of investing in the horses industry and the Honourable Attorney-General might be aware of this, to address the traffic congestion issue. Just make sure the Police do not book those horses too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps, the honourable Minister for Economy can also in response, highlight how the LTA will now maintain its revenue, given it has been listed as an entity intended for reform under the Department of Public Enterprises, just like Water Authority of Fiji (WAF). Will LTA keep their own funds, or will this be sent to the Government's Consolidated Fund Account? This brings me to my next question, will LTA staff have to face the bleak future with possible redundancies because of the impending reforms and reduced budgetary allocations?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on addressing the challenges of travelling at ease, last year the honourable Minister for Economy made a trip to India to study the possibility of train operations. Why is there no mention of this project, even as a feasibility study for Fiji? We had suggested trams earlier, stop the dilly-dallying and get this work done already! If you are looking for landmark piece of history with your Minister of Infrastructure at the back there as your legacy, that will be yours. So grab it before we do!

On WAF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note they appear on a separate Head and have been given \$258.7 million, which is a reduction from last year's budget of \$349.3 million.

Again, a significant amount of 95 percent of this budget appears under Requisition to Incur Expenditure (RIE). The major water issues faced by our people around the country continues to be significant. There was obvious abuse occurring in this area, which I had similarly highlighted in the past.

I note in the Auditor-General's Report that these occurrences have become common and is a far cry from what was claimed when WAF was reformed, from the Department of Water and Sewerage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, taxpayers' funds must be used where appropriate and I reiterate my call for Government to also compensate landowners, whose resources are utilised to bring this basic need to the people. And I have with me a request from *Mataqali* Valebure of Colo-i-Suva on their claims regarding the loss of potential revenue over 51 years, where they had given their forest for Savura Dam.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on shipping, I note that the Government Shipping Franchise has been given the same allocation as they received last year of \$2.3 million. However, this must come with conditions that mandate shipping companies to provide services that are of high quality.

Some reports and pictures obtained of certain boat companies servicing the Lau, Koro and Kadavu Islands, raise a lot of concerns and I urge the Maritime and Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) to perform their role diligently and ground these vessels so they do not compromise the lives of the people.

I urge the Government to also review the role of Fiji Ships and Heavy Industries which plays a crucial role for affordability in stevedoring business and for building of good ships for our part of the region. Please, consider investing in this sector again, and seriously for the long-term sustainability of our shipping industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year, I had asked the Government to consider putting proper lights at our ports and jetties and after hearing the honourable Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, I commend the Government for taking this initiative to accommodate night landing provisions, as we plan for futuristic sustainable economic development for our outer islands.

On the announced initiative to increase the shipping route franchise from two years to 15 years, I caution Government to confirm to this House that the provision of quality services would not be compromised at the expense of profit, and also compromise Fiji's commitment to the Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to round up my contribution, I wish to draw on the issue of youth. Unemployment, drugs, high incidents of crime, depression, teenage pregnancies and suicide are major concerns confronting them today. Unless and until Government is serious about reviewing laws that are in place to cater for their sociological and emotional needs, Fiji faces a bleak future.

The programmes for their education is acknowledged, Mr. Speaker, Sir. However, Government must refrain from promising them assistance it has no intention of carrying out. False promises, like the \$300 assistance to be given to each graduating student has not been received by anyone till to date.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last two years I had spoken at great lengths about challenges occurring at the University of the South Pacific (USP). I know when I first raised my concerns about the obvious mismanagement occurring at USP, no eyebrows were raised from the other side. All I saw today was skeptical looks.

What do they need to say now about FICAC's presence at the institution, investigating the recently revealed USP scam concerning major biases and blatant misuse of donor and regional island funds? Perhaps, it is time to caution Government yet again about rewarding its puppets, like the former USP Vice-Chancellor, now the new Vice-Chancellor for the Fiji National University (FNU).

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- There is an investigation.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It does not pay to keep scammers, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I feel strongly that the changes to the USP Foundation Studies and Pacific TAFE have been made at the behest of the culprit now at FNU. I am reliably told that FNU is struggling to strengthen the sub-degree.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- I challenge you to say that outside.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- In conclusion, let me now take this time to ask Government, yet again, on an update on the status of the *Turaga na Qaranivalu*, who has applied for release under the Mercy Commission. I trust that his request, as well as those of others like him who are in prison for political reasons, be considered fairly please, and they be given due justice sooner rather later.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I join my fellow colleagues on this side of the House in opposing the 2019-2020 Budget. God bless Fiji and May God bless us all. *Vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for this contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to speak on this Budget debate.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, audience in the gallery and television viewers throughout Fiji; Budget is always designed as a control mechanism, guiding us to smarter use of our finances and resources at our disposal.

The 2019-2020 budget is no exception. This Budget aims to empower everyone to work smarter through accountability and transparency to achieve optimum result.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, our country as a whole has enjoyed 10 consecutive years of economic growth which was only achieved through prudent leadership and proper management of financial resources.

At this point in time, it is only proper to thank and acknowledge the hard work of the honourable Minister for Economy and his team for the mammoth task they undertook to prepare such a comprehensive and practical Budget that stands to benefit the Fijian community as a whole.

The Ministry of Economy under the commendable leadership of the honourable Minister for Economy has left no stone unturned to ensure every spending is accounted for and that there is no wastage.

The FijiFirst Government has always been focussed to empower its people to make sound judgment. Sound judgement leads to economic and financial freedom, which leads to a nation's growth and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the tactical switch from direct to indirect taxation creates a broad tax base which improves our revenue without hurting pockets of our ordinary Fijians.

By maintaining the minimum income threshold to \$30,000 in the formal sector means individuals who earn less than \$30,000 do not pay income tax. In cases where both, the husband and wife are working and their gross income is less than \$30,000 each, the same family will not be paying a single dollar in income tax up to \$60,000. This means, Fijians now have more disposable income at hand for consumption and investment.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this Budget continues to support earlier initiatives of the Government by providing housing assistance, education assistance, better roads, improved connectivity and the ability to make a living and contribute to the economy.

Mr. Speaker Sir, like many economies in the world, the agricultural sector plays a very important role, not only for export purposes, but also for food security and survival of its citizens. Similarly, our oldest industry, that is, the sugar industry continues to play a pivotal role in our economy.

Mr. Speaker Sir, today tens of thousands of Fijians are either directly or indirectly dependent on this industry for their survival. This industry has always been a political playground for political parties for their own gains at the expense of poor farmers, which brought the sugar industry down to its knees.

No Government before the Bainimarama and FijiFirst Government was genuinely committed to support and revive the sugar industry. Continued capital injection to reduce farmers' costs for a past number of years is testimony of the FijiFirst Government's commitment to bring back the industry to its feet.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in the 2018-2019 Budget, the Ministry of Sugar Industry was allocated a total budget of \$62.3 million, and in the 2019-2020 Budget the Ministry of Sugar Industry is allocated \$70.4 million. This is an increase of more than \$8 million when compared to 2018-2019 Budget allocated to the Ministry of Sugar Industry. The increase in the total budget allocation is reconfirmation of FijiFirst Government's commitment to revive the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker Sir, by allocating \$30 million to establish a stabilisation fund to assure that sugarcane growers will receive a guaranteed price of \$85 per tonne has further boosted the confidence of growers in the sugar industry. The 2019-2020 Budget further assures that the FijiFirst Government will continue to provide the ongoing support to the sugarcane growers through the fertilizer and weedicide subsidies and cane planting grants to encourage growers to boost cane production.

The Ministry of Sugar Industry will also entice the young generation and new farmers into the sugar industry with its current comprehensive package to start up the sugarcane farms by meeting cost

of acquiring leases, cane contracts, preparing and planting, and before it was 2 hectares but now 4 hectares of sugarcane through new farmers' assistance budget.

The \$4 million allocation for cane cartage in the 2019-2020 Budget is assurance to all growers in the Penang Mill area that cartage costs from the Penang Mill area to Rarawai Mill will be met by the Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the high and uncommon cartage rates charged to growers continues to affect the poor farmers' net profit from the proceeds of cane. Announcement of regulating of the carting rate by FCCC will ensure that growers are charged fairly for the carting of their cane.

On the same note, by allocating \$5.9 million for FSC to procure trucks will provide competition to further lower the cartage rate. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 10 consecutive years of economic growth created huge employment opportunities through increased investment in different employment sectors. This increase has increased employment, created huge employment opportunities in the formal sector, thus creating shortage of labour within the agriculture sector including the sugar industry.

To address this shortage of labour issues, the Fijian Government has invested in mechanisation which includes providing grants to 31 cooperatives for procurement of harvesters to address the shortage of cane cutters, and 22 cooperatives for procurement of tractors with implements for farmers to work on their farms. The budget allocation of \$500,000 for mechanisation demonstrates that more and more sugar farms would be mechanised and this will create a modern sugar industry in the near future.

Side tracking from this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, over these two days we have heard nothing constructive from the Opposition. In fact their contribution has been hollow like the packet they are carrying around. The Bainimarama boom cannot be contained in those packets. This Boom is for the nation, you need a packet size of this country and mind of that size to understand this Budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with these words, I whole heartedly commend the 2019-2020 Budget. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is an honour to address this august Parliament regarding the 2019-2020 Budget allocated to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. The total allocation to the Ministry for the upcoming fiscal year is \$127.7 million. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the largest portion of the Ministry's total budget allocation in the new fiscal year is for the administration of the nation's core social protection programmes. The cliental benefiting from these programmes include children, pregnant women living in rural areas, person's living with disabilities, single parents with no source of income, elderly, it is the cross-life spectrum from cradle to the grave. A social protection system has a key aim of living no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Poverty Benefit Scheme that currently assists over 26,000 households has been allocated \$36 million for the new fiscal year, whereas the Care and Protection Allowance Programme that currently assists over 7,000 single parented households, who have no sustainable source of income to look after their children has been allocated \$8 million. The allowances per household will depend largely on the number of dependents and case by case assessments with the \$50 food voucher remaining the same and complementary to the cash allowances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allowance of a \$100 under the Social Pension Scheme will be maintained in the next financial year with the eligibility age remaining at 65. The increase in the Social Pension Scheme budget allocation which now brings it to \$46 million in the new financial year, is based on an estimation of the number of persons who may be eligible in the next year. The introduction of the Social Pension Scheme in 2013, the progressive reduction of the eligibility age from 70 to 65, the increase of the allowance from \$30 to \$50 and to \$100 since 2017 sure speaks volumes of the Bainimarama Government's commitment to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and to the senior citizens of Fiji.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of over 81,000 senior citizens and people living with disabilities also continue to benefit from Government's bus fare subsidy and we acknowledge the receipt of \$10 million towards this programme.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- *Vinaka.*

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- The expanded food voucher for rural pregnant mothers will be maintained at \$50 in this Budget year with the allocation of \$900,000. This allowance will continue to encourage our rural pregnant mothers to go for motherly clinics, to avoid complications during child birth and at the same time assist in providing proper nutritional food for them and their unborn babies.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka.*

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- We also continue to administer the disability allowance with an allocated budget of \$5 million. This programme currently supports over 5,000 beneficiaries at the amount of \$90 per month. This again indicates Government's commitment in ensuring that the rights of every individual including persons with disabilities as enshrined in the Constitution is addressed. This Budget also continues an \$850,000 grant to Hilton Special School, the only Special School which provide the early intervention services for children living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all in all for this new Budget, a total of \$19.5 million has been allocated across of Government including through the Ministry of Education for programmes targeted at the welfare of persons living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite disappointing then that over the past two days and including today, I have heard things like, half of our population living in poverty, things like, this Government takes from the poor and gives to the rich, that this Government is numb to the needs of Fijian people, that we are deaf, we are blind and mute to the needs of the Fijian people. I ask honourable Speaker, which Fijian people are we talking about? The Fijian people living with disabilities who for the first time in 2018 under this Government...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- ... now have a law specifically made for them making them visible in a way they never were before.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Or are we numb, deaf, blind and mute because of the disability allowance that persons living with disabilities now receive, which no other government has ever granted to them.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Which Fijian people are we talking about? Is it the victims of domestic violence, mostly women, who until 2009 under the Bainimarama Government had no custom made law in place to take care of the special circumstance as victims and survivors of domestic violence.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Or is it the over 43,000 elderly citizens who have never had the benefit of receiving a pension in their lives and who under this Government are now the proud beneficiaries of social protection.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Or maybe it is over 7,000 single-parented families with no source of income to look after their children but rely on the monthly care and protection allowance to do so. Or is it over the 80,000 elderly citizens and persons living with disabilities who benefit from the monthly bus fare top up paid for by Government. Or is it over the 40,000 beneficiaries of our national social protection net whose families benefit from the insurance package fully paid for by Government. Maybe the 100's of women that Government partners bring to Suva every year to expose them to the economic opportunities that they have in their communities with their own hands.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- So, Honourable Speaker, a few years ago a great man walked into this House and made a plea to honourable Members of this august House asking that we put the honour back into honourable. A strong statement. I would like to repeat that call today asking us honourable Members that when it comes to Government social protection programmes and Government's quest to make every Fijian visible to ensure that no one is left behind, please do not dishonour yourself by trying to run Government down because when you look back into the history books of this country, post-independence, pre-independence there is no other Government that has done so much...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- ..for people who have been left behind in this country; no other Government has done that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, higher spending does not always mean better outcomes. In practice, governance arrangements and methods will determine how far these investments contribute effective quality reductions. The Ministry is happy to have received an allocation of \$25,000 for the review of the social protection programmes systems and processes. We are aiming to address any possible gaps in the administration of all these social protection programmes to ensure accurate and timely payments, avoidance of overpayments and double dipping, improvement of standard operating procedures and facilitation of timely reviews for graduation and termination of allowances as necessary.

Last week the Ministry hosted its first National Poverty Forum bringing together stakeholders from within Government and also from the Non-Government sector in an attempt to form a national platform for a poverty alleviation going forward. It is envisaged that such a platform will assist us as a nation to analyse institutionally owned information and data better with the aim of identifying those who have been left behind and targeting responses that aim to bring them into the fold.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we acknowledge the continued funding for the Child Protection Programme in this new Budget and are also very grateful for a new funding of \$25,000 to enable consultations with stakeholders to address the need for Child Care Services in Fiji.

This was a pledge made by the FijiFirst Party in its manifesto in realisation of the role of parents and in particular women in the unpaid care economy and how that role poses a real challenge for women in the world of work. Often times coming in late to work or even resigning from their jobs to look after their children. A few weeks ago the International Finance Corporation a branch of the World Bank launched a report entitled "*The Business Case for Employers Support Child Care in Fiji*".

The report is the outcome of a study carried out by the same body which sought to assess the child care needs of workers in Fiji and see how that need affected their productivity and workers ability to stay employed.

This complements the FijiFirst Party's manifesto which pledges to ensure that policies encourage decision making in relationships especially as they relate to child care amongst other things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's role with the Department of the Social Welfare is not limited to Government Social Welfares Scheme and Child Protection Programmes. It also entails the rehabilitation of juveniles in conflict with the law.

The Budget allocation for the running of the institution will enable the Ministry to focus in providing rehabilitation programmes that will empower these juveniles and prepare them to be productive members in society.

As of 2016, the Ministry has been given the added responsibility of administering three States Homes for older persons. Upon taking over the Ministry, I had seen the urgent need for the renovation and upgrading of these homes and in this fiscal year, we have been allocated funds to continue to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to the budget of the operation of the Department of Social Welfare, we have also been allocated a budget for the administration and operation of the Poverty Monitoring Unit which became part of the Ministry in 2015. We are content with the allocation of the budget for the next fiscal year with the increment in the Integrated National Poverty Eradication Programmes, accommodating the need to cater for a Geospatial Information System.

The unit with this allocation aims to effectively and efficiently monitor and evaluate Government's Poverty Alleviation Programmes. A key focus will be the collation of desegregated data for informed decision making policy review and planning.

And on that note, honourable Speaker, again, sweeping statements made in this honourable House. Half of Fiji's population living under the poverty line. That is very careless coming from honourable Members of this House when we have got national statistics that prove that the national

poverty rate has declined from 31 percent in 2008-2009 to 28.1 percent in 2013-2014. Let us use data that is out there that is nationally recognised instead of making general sweeping statements in this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Budget is the most comprehensive statement of a Government Social and Economic Plans and Priorities in tracking where the money comes from and where it goes. Budgets determine how public funds are raised, how they are used and who benefits from them. Therefore, implementing commitment towards gender equality requires targeted interventions and measures across the whole of Government.

A gender responsive Budget is not necessarily about increasing spending. It is about working as a whole of Government to make resources go further and to better deliver for women and girls. This means that how we spend our money and what we choose to invest in is even more important than ever. It is about boosting efforts to strengthen gender mainstreaming and accountability for gender equality and reporting on gender equality investments.

The 2019-2020 Budget reaffirms this Government's commitment to gender equality with the allocation of \$4.7 million for the Department of Women while prioritising the implementation of the National Gender Policy with the whole Government approach fostering partnership coordination in order to better deliver for women and girls in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Women's Plan of Action is at present under review where it will update on progress and challenges for the last ten years and inform the development of the National Gender Policy 5-Year Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 aligned with the Convention Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

Talking about a whole of Government approach and gender mainstreaming, with an example towards goals of economic empowerment, I would like to highlight a few lines of budget allocations where this budget invests rightfully and smartly in women and girls. We focus on education, agriculture, infrastructure, climate change and others. Education is the passport to better jobs, higher incomes and improved life chances for girls. Fiji has progressed a lot to achieve some critical goals when it comes to enrolments graduation. The Free Education Programme (Year 1 to Year 13) with the allocation of \$63 million in 2019, female students comprise 48 percent of primary school and 52 percent of secondary school enrolments.

The National Toppers Scholarship Scheme with the allocation of \$41 million in 2017, female students comprise 54 percent, Tertiary Scholarships and Loan Scheme with the allocation of \$181.8 million in 2017, female students comprise 47 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, market vendors are pre-dominantly women and market places offer important venues to effect women social and economic change. This Budget does invest in women market vendors, with an allocation of \$30 million through the Ministry of Local Government, infrastructure would be improved with the gender lens:

- i) In Lautoka with 392 females and 86 male vendors;
- ii) Namaka Market with 140 females and 50 male vendors; and
- iii) Lami Market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change, natural disaster affect women and men's well-being differently. In terms of agricultural production, food security, health, water and energy resources and security.

The Ministry would work very closely with all relevant stakeholders to ensure women and girls empowerment through gender responsive climate policies, climate smart agriculture, green women's entrepreneurship, access to sustainable energy, access to green jobs and here I would like to highlight again the allocation for Barefoot College for the building of Barefoot College.

We heard yesterday that all we have is a billboard standing in an empty field. Honourable Speaker, we are not building a shed here, we are building a training institute in conjunction with our partners in India. It requires a lot of planning. We have a small picture but this is the work that is happening behind the billboard. It is a lot of work.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Tell them, tell them!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- It is not something that is going to spring out overnight, so we are grateful for the allocation in our current year to ensure that we move forward with the building of this Training Institute for the empowerment of women living in rural communities, to make them realise the potential of becoming solar engineers and complement government's efforts in green energy.

Tracking progress for gender equality across all sustainable development goals requires access to quality data that are collected frequently and regularly. This Budget includes \$4.5 million to conduct the agricultural census. We have heard that from the honourable Minister. This would serve as an important vehicle for collecting data on the type and amount of work contributed by women to agricultural production challenges and informed future policies and interventions towards the goal of gender equality.

Moreover, an allocation of \$10,000.00 for our gender database. We will ensure that serious work begins towards the collation of relevant data to map our national progress towards attainment of SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Creative industries are increasingly acknowledged worldwide for having enormous potential as engines driving economic and social development. Not only do they account for higher than average growth rate and job creation, but they are also channels of cultural identity which play a key role in promoting cultural diversity. The cultural and creative industry such as handicrafts are also often traditionally home-based and characterised by the strong presence of female artists and producers.

In Fiji, the handicraft sector employs mostly women. Only last week, the Ministry organised the 5th Fiji Women's National Expo, successfully with the total sales of over \$460,000, attendance of 500 women artisans from all over Fiji to recognise and celebrate the talents of Fijian women artists. The Expo intends to improve the economic position of women by providing a national platform to showcase their products, connect to the market, collaborate and co-create.

The initiative offers women in addition, the opportunity to refine their design and business management skills through product quality control, packaging and labelling, certification, and licensing and financial literacy assistance. The Budget recognises with an allocation of \$500,000 that empowering Fijian women artisans across handicraft value chains present a unique opportunity to create business value and strengthen women's economic empowerment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Fiji we are challenged by the high rate of violence against women and girls. Research indicates that the cost of violence against women could amount to around 2 percent of the global gross domestic product. This is equivalent to \$1.5 trillion. To eliminate violence against women and girls, this Budget has continued to allocate \$200,000 for the Management of the Domestic Violence Toll Free Helpline – 1560. This Helpline is managed by the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre through a partnership with the Ministry.

Also an allocation of \$80,000 to the Fiji Women’s Federation will see robust work towards strengthening its role in safeguarding women’s human rights and interests. This Budget also includes an allocation of \$30,000 for Domestic Violence Support Fund and a \$150,000 for NGO grants. Non-government women organisations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, complement the work that Government does and continues to do in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of the women.

Government will provide financial assistance of \$300,000 to three reputable organisations which have demonstrated great commitment towards the capacity-building of women through practical and strategic training within their centres. We also acknowledge the allocation of \$150,000 towards support for the Homes of Hope specifically for a programme to support young single mothers, who are victims of sexual exploitation and their children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijian women have been speaking for decades. It was this Government and the Bainimarama Government before it that actually amplified that voice through National Budgets which enable programmes and initiatives which for the first time, brought women out from behind closed doors with the pledge to leave no one behind, to provide a space where women’s voices can continue to be heard and amplified, where their issues are considered and to let them know that their contribution is acknowledged. This is the principle on which the Government has allocated budget towards the development of our Fijian women.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new fiscal year looks exciting for us as a Ministry as we get ready to carry out our ongoing and new projects and programmes for the specific groups of Fijian people, we are humbled to serve.

With these, we at the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation are prepared to take on the New Year with greater motivation and ability to serve Fijian people better. Accordingly, I support the 2019/2020 National Budget and I look forward to another year of service to the Fijian people, I have sworn to serve as a Member of Parliament and as a Government Minister. I thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, the honourable Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I rise to support and commend the 2019/2020 National Budget that was presented by the Honourable Minister for Economy on Friday, the 7th of June, and I congratulate him and his team because I have witnessed for the first time how hard it is to work on the Budget, and I have seen it for myself the amount of dedication and the commitment that the team at the Ministry of Economy working with our team and to be able to compile this Budget. This is something not done just as a whim, not done just by pulling the numbers out of the sky. There

has been a lot of thought and preparation, a lot of thinking, a lot of wisdom around the Budget and that is something I want to make very clear as I begin today.

I also would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his visionary leadership and unwavering support. Honourable Speaker, I want to begin by just commenting on some of the comments that came through the floor over the last two days and discuss a little bit before I go straight on to health. I want to start by saying honourable Speaker, that yesterday the honourable Tikoduadua took a bit of time discussing about the door at the CWM Hospital. Yes, this is unacceptable and it shows that we need to work on civil servants to make sure that they are doing the work in monitoring and evaluation and ensuring that works are done, and we have made provisions within the Budget to do this but this is not an indication of health.

Health in this nation is not indicated by a falling door. There are clinical indicators and I want to share with you some clinical indicators that I have with me today and I have presented it before. Fiji's infant mortality rate currently sits at 18.3 per 1,000 live births. This is better than the global infant mortality rate which now sits at 29 per 1,000 live births. The SDG target for new rates of mortality rate – another clinical indicator by 2030 (that is about 11 years away) is 12 per 1,000 live births. Today is 2019, today, currently Fiji's neonatal mortality rate sits at 11.1. We are already below the target. Another SDG target is the under-five mortality rate which is by SDG targeting that by 2030 should be 25 per 1,000 live births.

Honourable Speaker, at this moment 2019, Fiji sits as 22.6 below that target.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- We have achieved those targets even before the approved time. That is the sign of health that is a sign that as a nation, we are healthy.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Not the door.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I also want to comment on two others. One was my good friend and Old Boys, honourable Rasova, and he said in Hansard, Page 1855 paragraph 7, I was here yesterday. And I quote:

“I wonder if the Minister of Health was consulted here of the restriction of free milk to go into rural maritime areas. The students in rural and maritime have been getting “fresh is best free milk” from their mothers for the last 6 to 7 years.”

Honourable Speaker, mothers do not breastfeed more than two years.

(Laughter)

And to suggest that rural women are breastfeeding at 6 years and 7 years for their child to me is belittling of rural women.

(Laughter)

Unacceptable. Another one, honourable Speaker, is the honourable Saukuru who brought up in this august House yesterday the discussion of the murder and cannibalism of Reverend Thomas Baker

in my mother's province in Navosa. I was embarrassed, why bring it up? That is what they do, they talk about the bad past in the provinces.

I want to tell this august House what we view of Navosa, Government values Navosa.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- That is why we are building a Government Station in Navosa, that is why the Honourable Prime Minister opened the Legal Aid Office in Navosa, that is why we are having more than \$25 million for a Hospital to open in Navosa.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- That is why we are working on both the North side even the East side of Navosa. That is why we are continuing to build bridges in Navosa.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Because we believe in the future of Navosa, not on the bad future, bad history of Navosa.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- So when you talk about my mother's place, talk about the good things about them, not the bad because that is God.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- I never mentioned about Navosa, Sir.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Then what you mentioned?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- I never mentioned about Navosa in my speech.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- And he is misleading the Parliament. I have a different perspective of the disaster. I am talking about natural disaster, without God, what God has done to this land.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, whatever was said about Thomas Baker being cannibalised somewhere up there, that was in Navosa.

(Laughter)

The Budget of \$349.8 million for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is to further improve our health and wellbeing.

It is built to reach the unreached that non-one is left behind. And this is a welcome provision. Its major expansions, ever since this Government came into power, and we need to consolidate these gains by refocusing on greater efficiencies that will show more kindly access to health services.

The Government's vision is in line with the vision of WHO which is universal health coverage, and aspiring to the standards of the universal health coverage and there are 3 Pillars of universal health coverage, those are:

- 1) Leaving no one behind;
- 2) Making sure that you are reaching all the unreached; and
- 3) Ensuring that we decrease the amount of pocket expenses of those who are in the places that we are trying to reach.

To that extent, honourable Speaker, in our 207 facilities all over Fiji, we are beginning to use these 207 facilities to base our services that will reach right down to the community. When we talk about healthcare, we are full-focused on work that our doctors and nurses do every day in Hospitals and Health Centres and Nursing Stations.

But, we must not overlook the vital contribution that all participate in, whether it is through using vehicles, using boats and sometimes in areas that are hard to reach, they may have to walk, but this is the whole collective effort to be able to provide health in its whole context.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- We have, honourable Speaker, one of the world's highest rates of Expanded Program for Immunisation (EPI) at 96 percent. That means that our children are protected against deadly and disabling diseases.

And the impact of climate change is the reality that we here in Fiji need to live with and adapt to. The impact of *TC Winston* is well-known, it is estimated that it took away at least 20 per cent of our GDP and our nation about \$500 million. Likewise the intense storms and flooding that Fijians experience not only have an economic impact but also lead to surges in viral and other infections. Improving our reach, with a focus on ensuring that all people in Fiji have timely access to our services is a key strategy to dealing with the adverse health impacts of climate change.

Our Ministry is committed to reducing the effects of related health impacts such as leptospirosis, typhoid, dengue and tuberculosis. Fiji achieved a significant milestone last month when the Ministry of Health and Medical Services Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) became the 15th country to be declared Type one (1) Fixed Emergency Medical Team (EMT). The Director General of WHO tweeted the message, and I quote,

“The accreditation of Fiji's emergency medical team is a testament to small island nations that when it works together and focuses on investing on their national capacity can reach the heights that are acceptable worldwide”

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, signifies the potential and capacity that we have towards a safer and high-quality rapid health emergency team. FEMAT is made of people like you and I, that love Fiji, who volunteer their time because they see a vision of selfless service. These men and women of FEMAT remind me of the Hippocratic Oath which doctors have to say, which is “I consecrate my life to the

service of Humanity”. Last month, at the WHA (World Health Assembly) in Geneva as we chaired the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting they again had a talanoa session of the theme of, “Universal Health Coverage, Reaching the Unreachable and Leaving No One Behind”. So the discussions is happening on a global scale and is also discussing on a local scale, and this Budget is geared to actually supporting that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- We acknowledge the enormous contribution visiting medical teams have towards the up-skilling of our local people who have had the opportunity to working alongside them, and as a result, our local capacity in terms of specialised health care services continues to improve and as such, we are becoming better to be able to support our people with quality standards.

The Ministry of Health Medical Services, Public Health Service is committed to improving the health and well-being of all Fijians, regardless of income or geographic locations. In its effort to curb the rise in NCDs, HIV/AIDS and communicable disease, the Ministry is embarking on a new approach which is wide-reaching to holistic, providing preventative, curative and rehabilitative care and treatment to encourage healthy lifestyles.

As the Minister responsible for health and wellbeing, it is incumbent on me and our staff to ensure that people are knowledgeable and health conscious. In our effort to achieve this our people have had the pleasure of visiting formal and informal settlements in our peri-urban areas and communities in the maritime zone, in the highlands of both Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, sharing the vision of Government to empower Fijians to take ownership of their own health and lead longer, healthier lives.

These visits include informal settlements such as Tauluga in Lami, Veiraisi in Kinoya, Wailea in Vatuwaqa, Matanagata in Vatukoula, Waisere in Naitasiri and many more. I have had the opportunity of visiting villages across the nation. I even had the opportunity to sleep in the village in Namosi.

These visitations by our staff is in the continuous strengthening of preventative outreach programs relating to family health, adolescent health, child health, environmental health and mental health awareness. And to this, Government has allocated \$6.4 million to continue this important work this year.

A total funding of \$19.1M has been allocated to major infrastructure projects, refurbishment, upgrading and extensions of health facilities around the country. These projects include upgrading and maintenance of the Valelevu Health Centre and its institutional quarters in order to pursue and modernise our centres to cater for the growing population within the Nasinu corridor. We have done major renovations at the Valelevu Health Centre and will continue to do so within this Budget. People are already seeing and are clearly happy that the changes are happening, and the 2019-2020 Budget, Mr. Speaker, has allocated another \$1.2 million to continue to do the upgrades in the Lami and Nausori corridor.

The extension of the CWM Hospital Maternity Unit, this 200 bed facility when completed will serve the need for all our expecting and delivering mothers. The CWM Maternity Unit is no longer large enough on its own to serve the needs of the population. It is at the moment being supplemented by the Makoi Maternity Unit. A better facility will also lead to better services and staff performance. I am happy to say that the government has given us \$4M for this project.

I have talked about the Navosa Divisional Hospital and its 18 bed capacity, and to this Government has set aside \$7.5 million for the completion of the last phase of this project.

Honourable Speaker, I was in Rakiraki Hospital last week, and while I was there, I had the opportunity to meet many people from Ra. What I saw was that people around the Waimicia side have to come all the way to Rakiraki Hospital for dental clinics. I am grateful that the 2019-2020 Budget is allocating \$687,531, and part of this budget will allow the Ministry to set up a new dental clinic at the Waimaro Health Centre to cater for the special people of Ra.

HON. MEMBER.- *Vinaka.*

HON. DR. I WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, I also had a pleasure on Saturday to meet Mrs Asela Ravulo, a Community Health Worker at Korovuli village in Seaqaqa in Vanualevu, who came all the way to Vunidawa to celebrate with us National World Blood Drive Day. She is a lady who is a community health worker being paid under the Bainimarama Government under the new scheme. She mobilised her entire community for a blood drive recruitment process, and the blood that was collected was directed towards saving lives at the Labasa Hospital. This is just part of the great help and assistance the community health workers have been to the Ministry of Health across Fiji, and to this government has allocated \$2.5 million to ensure the continuation of government support for our community health workers.

Mr. Speaker, in early March this year, a retired gentleman, sixty-seven years old from Navua who would remained unnamed knocked on my door seeking assistance from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services for medical treatment overseas for a cardiac complication. Devastated by the prospect of losing their father, husband and wife and the three children standing alongside him in the process until all of his documentation was verified. The gentleman was sent to New Delhi, in India for an open heart surgery, recovered well and is now happy to be back in Navua with his entire family. Government paid all the bills, treatment, air fares and accommodation and for this the Government has allocated \$1.5 million in the next budget year of 2019-2020.

Mr. Speaker, the global health framework of Universal Health Coverage has now become the driving force for all our outreach programmes. The marine vessel Veivueti was recently in Lau for thirty-three days, before that it was in Lomaiviti, and for this in doing our outreach programmes and being able to provide services that are only available at the centres in Suva, Government has allocated \$185,000 in the financial year to support our outreach programme.

Over the years Mr. Speaker we have seen a gradual increase of general practitioners doing locum in our public facilities. There was a question by the honourable Ratu Antonio Lalabalavu about how we provide locums? We provide locums based on need, these are actually being given to us by the Sub-Divisional Medical Officers and the Divisional Medical Officers. So, in places where there is a lot, there is a health centre with lots of doctors they may not need a locum. In places where there are a lot of general practitioners around and we do not actually need to have extra doctors within the facility, we may not need a locum.

But Valelevu Health Centre is one benefiting from the arrangement of using locum general practitioners. It increases human resource capacity within our facility thereby reducing doctor to patient ratio. It reduces waiting time for our patients, using the massive experience within this General Practitioner who also agreed to do locum. In the 2019-2020 budget, Government has allocated \$2.5

million on GP locum, which will certainly ensure a more patient centred approach in all our public facilities.

Mr. Speaker, our infrastructure refurbishments are now being designed to world-class structural standards and are at least Category 4 compliant. In terms of health care services provided, these infrastructure projects will also ensure the provision of standard services across all health care facilities in Fiji. Service loads will be shared more evenly amongst the health care workers across all health facilities irrespective of locations and quality services will be more readily available for all Fijian people no matter where they live.

And to support this expansion in facilities and services, the Ministry will for the first time in its history have well over 900 doctors once the next pool of graduates come through at the end of this year. The Ministry has also overseen a major expansion in clinical services and we now have Urology, Neurology and Neurosurgery, Endoscopic surgery, cardiac, a catheterisation Lab, to name a few.

And this supports the government's desire to achieve fiscal stability for the medium term because we need to consolidate many of the gains in expanded services by promoting quality care and greater efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is determined to improve the quality of our services provided in all our 207 facilities, including the corporate office beginning with our head office in Suva. There is a significant need for continuous improvement in our Ministry, continuous improvement in professionalism to protect lives and reduce complaints. The 2019-2020 Budget allows the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to strengthen our human resource procedures, to improve quality and deal appropriately with processes and staff who have faulted our people. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services does not condone unprofessionalism.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is committed to improving efficiency and developing a compassionate, committed, professional and ethical workforce in both the health professionals and the corporate professionals who support the health services division.

Our Ministry, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services needs the support of the nation. We need to respect our health facilities. Two third of our staff are women, and we need to protect them. When staff are being pulled out, just like recently, a lady Doctor was pulled out of an island because she was threatened, there is a cost to the people, and there is a cost to Government.

Mr. Speaker, we need to stop the pilfering happening in our facilities and also we need to stop damaging and desecrating our health facilities. These damages cause the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to utilise already committed resources for needed repairs.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to now acknowledge the tremendous effort of everyone in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the clinical staff, the corporate staff. I would like to say that our collective efforts are being recognised, and I appreciate the many things that they have done. I know there are many, many improvements to be done also, but for that, I am grateful that the Budget that is before us will enable us to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support and commend the 2019-2020 Budget. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services for his contribution to the Debate. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy Civil Service and Communication to give the Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to provide my Right of Reply 2019-2020 National Budget. I know it is bit late in the day, it has been a fairly long day so I will be very brief.

However, because also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is not much to respond to because the contribution by the Opposition has been, to be very polite, very pedestrian. I hope Mr. Speaker, Sir that I would also be given enough time as I gave up my right to speak at the second reading.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, listening to the Opposition's response in the Budget, there was misrepresentation of facts, inaccuracies, contradictions, deliberate manipulations, personalisation of issues, attempted character assassination, and cheap and obviously impertinent political shots. They have nothing of value to say on the Budget.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is what we have come to expect from the Opposition, the SODELPA and NFP combined, reminiscent of the past five years. There are no new ideas, no plausible alternatives, nothing constructive to take Fiji forward. Just the same old rhetoric, insidious and blatant bigotry, ethnic reference and hypocrisy led by an Opposition Leader that brought Fiji to its knees to the verge of economic chaos and disaster that Fijians are still paying for today.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the level of contributions coming from the Opposition makes us wonder if they even have the ability to even design a budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Members have never offered a proper alternative budget even though the honourable Prasad claimed, this at the 11th hour after the Members of Government had been demanding for this for the past two days. There is no surprise Mr. Speaker, Sir, why they were rejected at the polls in 2014 and 2018. Not once, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but twice rejected by the Fijian people.

When the results of the 2018 Elections came out, I saw this is a great opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I saw the glass half full. I remarked to many that those who were elected in the Opposition including the new ones, would be once and for all revealed to the public. They would be revealed for their lack of intellectual vigour and indeed intellectual rigour, their lack of candour because they have the same old ideas.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Their lack of candour, inability to be a viable alternative Government. Inability, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to treat all Fijians equally, their inability to understand the fundamental needs of every day Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this contribution to this Budget Debate is the start of their demise. Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I walked in Parliament yesterday, and I did not notice, the honourable Prime Minister drew to my attention to the Boom washing powder packets. I thought that SODELPA was doing product placement to promote superb distributors or the importers of this detergent, to raise funds for their

campaign for the next general Election. Little did I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they were so obsessed with this passing phrase, “Bainimarama Boom”, that all that they could do was focus on it and their detergent box rather than focus on the Budget and its details. But thanks to their unfounded reaction, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to a passing phrase. Bainimarama Boom will now be forever etched in the minds of our people.

Mr. Speaker, of course, Fijians can now compare for themselves the Rabuka Doom or honourable Rabuka Doom now, with the Bainimarama Boom. The doom of the National Bank of Fiji (NBF), the doom he brought about right here in this Parliamentary Chambers.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The doom he brought about right here in this Parliamentary Chambers on 14th May, 1987, that forever, that forever changed the course of Fiji’s history. The doom he created in the lives of many Fijians who fled Fiji after the 1987 *coup* as the *coup* was predicated on ethnicity.

The subsequent doom and raid of common and equal citizenry and emigration will be indelibly etched in the minds and memories of many. And yet again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he insist that not everyone should be called a Fijian. He said this openly in Parliament yesterday and, of course, he is not the changed man he claims to be. It has a connection with the Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me respond to some of the contributions from the Opposition. The honourable Leader of the Opposition claimed that the Bainimarama-led Government did not face any major crisis or disaster. How absurd, Mr. Speaker, Sir!

We suffered the consequences of the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2009 where international banks collapsed all over the world and yet, he claimed that the GFC was during the Qarase Government’s time. We had *TC Winston* in 2016, the second largest storm in the world at that point in time and the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere to make landfall.

It wiped off approximately one-third of the value of our GDP within a space of less than 48 hours. We had to spend \$500 million in rebuild efforts and yet, the honourable Leader of the Opposition lamented that he had to build two bridges for \$14 million during his time after cyclone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, how can we trust an Opposition spokesman like this, who cannot grasp basic economic and financial fundamentals and, of course, in the process has been economical with the truth?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition incorrectly said that the debt of countries, such as USA and other larger economies are around 60 percent of GDP. He needs to get his facts right.

The debt of USA is around about 109 percent of its GDP. In other words, a nominal debt of US\$19.9 trillion. Japan has a debt of 234 percent of GDP, a nominal debt of US\$9.1 trillion. Singapore is 109 percent of GDP, which is US\$350 billion. And Canada has 84 percent of debt, which is about US\$1.4 trillion, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has misinformed this House and so have his other Members subsequently.

We have reiterated so many times in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there was a point of difference between indigenous rights, its applicability to Fiji and the exposure of indigenous people in Fiji, as opposed to indigenous people in other countries and indeed, conversely racism. They are two separate issues.

They use this issue for their own political expediency, but more fundamental than that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that this Opposition as demonstrated in the past 48 hours, will always develop the policies based on the consideration of ethnicity and provincialism, but not for the overall well-being of our nation and all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad in one breath, thanks honourable Opposition Members for their contribution to the Budget and completely ignored the ethnic twist of the honourable Leader of the Opposition. His voters must note this complicity.

And only prior to that honourable Tikoduadua stood up saying that they do not agree with honourable Kuridrani's statement, which was actually quite blatantly racial and divisive. NFP had to do this as it was so blatant and racial, and they only did it because they believe it may affect their vote bank. But NFP does not realise they have already lost it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir no one ever said, honourable Ro Tuisawau, that FNPF was not created under the previous Governments. In fact, we are on record for saying that it was the NFP that led to the formation of the FNPF.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA, SDL and SVT tried to claim that it was the Alliance Party's initiative. No one said that television did not come during the honourable Leader of Opposition's time. But what we are saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir that it is our innovative policies that further propelled some of the institutions that were created previously.

Whilst the NFP led the creation of the FNPF, records showed that FNPF was going to collapse because of the failure of the subsequent Governments - the Alliance Government, the Rabuka Government, the SVT Government, the SDL Government to rectify the rot identified by international superannuation experts and actuaries. The Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government corrected the blatant mismanagement of the FNPF, and today has made it an international award winning superannuation fund.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one said that the Alliance Government did not construct the Monasavu Dam in the 1970s. We did not say they did not. But what happened to the rights of the landowners? What environmental standards were met? What rents were they paid? How was their possessory rights affected? Did they have electricity in their homes when Suva was getting electricity?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- After decades, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the landowners ended up going to the court to get rightful compensation. And even then, we believed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the outcome was not fair to the landowners. We want to fix it but they need to be cohesive before we can help them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, did the Rabuka SVT Government, honourable Leader of Opposition now, and SDL Governments help them? Did they acknowledge what they went through? No, on both accounts. Did they provide electricity to them? No, again, Mr. Speaker. It was the Bainimarama-led Government and the Fijifirst Government that gave electricity to the people of Naitasiri, who for decades saw the wires over their villages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition is absolutely correct in saying television came to Fiji when he was in Government. But he did not talk about the monopoly that existed. It was only under the Bainimarama Government that *Mai TV* was issued a TV licence, and subsequently FBC.

He failed to mention that it was only under the Bainimarama Government and the Fijifirst Government that there was a rationalisation of the frequencies through an open tender process and the consequent data connectivity and accessibility through mobile broadband. The frequency rearrangements have led to the advent of digital television launch through the Walesi Platform which everyone can watch us now as we speak.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the telecommunication sector. The Bainimarama-led Government was the Government that got rid of the monopoly that Vodafone had. We opened the markets, and today we have Digicel creating competition, improving services to ordinary consumers. Under this Government, the monopolistic pricing by FINTEL and TFL have been and continued to be reviewed through the FCCC.

Under this Government there has been an exponential growth and affordability in internet connection. We are creating a liberal and open economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a transparent economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talked about State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), but look at their performance then and look at where it is now. AFL is now paying annual dividends of approximately \$45 million a year. EFL paid out \$28.5 million. We never received these types of payouts before, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as dividends.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talked about cuts to civil servants' salary by referring to reductions in SEG 1 and SEG 2, saying there is pay cuts as a result of that. Mr. Speaker, Sir, no civil servant pay has been cut. It demonstrates the lack of understanding of basic Government finances. If they came to the workshop where the PS for Economy and her team gave a blow by blow description of each line, they would have understood, and not look silly and imbecile in this Parliament.

For their information, Mr. Speaker, Sir that has been fact is these SEGs where vacancies had not been filled for years in some cases, where people's salaries had been plugged at the higher bands and they were not paid that amount. This is what we called sharpening of pencils, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Also, if they came to the workshop, they would understand labour rights. Honourable Leawere, who is, unfortunately, not here, attempted to create a kerfuffle about it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But, of course, we know his contributions are generally meaningless.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they failed to mention that all civil servants got a pay rise, valid terms and condition, meal allowances that has almost doubled from \$9 to \$20 a meal. Mr. Speaker, Sir, none of these was mentioned.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is interesting that honourable Gavoka did not mention anything about the zero duty for new hotels under SLIP. Lower duty rates of 5 percent and 3 percent for other hotels renovations, new and existing. He intentionally omitted this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As with other colleagues of his, it is what we call intellectual obfuscation or at very best dishonesty, but likes to call himself the expert in tourism. Of course, none of them mentioned about the reduction of tariffs on heavy machinery, trucks and buses that will assist the transportation sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Qereqeretabua holds herself out to be some patron of environmental rights did not acknowledge anything about the huge strides we are making in creating a tax free zone in Naboro for waste management, Mr. Speaker, Sir. She mentioned Freesoul, Freesoul has been prosecuted and the matter is before the courts. Mr. Speaker, Sir, she says our economy is in the ICU. I say that her level of economics is in the incubator.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Tikoduadua's entire contribution is about one door at the hospital. Honourable Minister for Health had just responded to that. But did he talk about the numerous hospitals and health centres being built?

He talked about the people of Navosa and how they get x-rays done, how they will be able to have procedures done. They do not have to travel all the way down to Sigatoka, all the way down to Ba, all the way down to Nadi, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The interior of Viti Levu, the number of doctors have increased, the number of nurses have increased, and their salaries have increased. You did not even mention the PPP (Public Private Partnership). We will now allow procedures in Fiji to take place which never have been, which never was able to take place before.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they mentioned inclusiveness. We have never had a government since Independence days that reached out to the public, to high schools, universities, social media engagements for Budget consultations. We never had that.

They talk about inclusion but in the same breath, they are doing ethnic analysis of the budget. They start talking in the vernacular language that most of the people around them do not understand, who do not know the language and they do not even bother to translate it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, inclusiveness is about respect. At least, we on this side of Parliament have that respect. We do not exclude people by speaking in a language that others do not understand. They have a good chuckle amongst themselves. They have no decency to translate it. They, in fact, are going against the Standing Orders.

They have stereotype version of what people are and how they should act like, right from what people should dress like. Honourable Tabuya has been a victim of that. In fact, how should people think? They like to have stereotypes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If you do not fit in their stereotypes, they call you, 'arrogant', *siosio*, *viavialevu*. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were the terms used.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate and I really say this, there is a lot of emotion. The honourable Leader of the Opposition brought in my father who was sitting in the gallery. He tried to compare my father with me, saying that the honourable MP is a very humble man'. In other words, I am not humble.

But let me tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that man will continue to be honourable, even after he is not in Parliament. Many of these people will not be honourable once they leave Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me tell you one more thing about my father. He has actually admonished me for not being severe enough on the Opposition, so honourable Leader of the Opposition, you need to know that. Gone are those days! He said, "I am too soft." He said, "You should always speak the truth and with just, because you have a leader who actually allows you to do so because we never had leaders that allowed us that liberal space to be able to talk about issues that had always been swept under the carpet. The elephant in the room was never talked about, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and to challenge the unjust paradigms that have plagued our society for decades, even over a century, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where truth and justice must prevail.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition needs to wake up. This is the new 21st century Fiji. The Constitution gives everyone the right to speak out. We have a leader who has not stopped us from speaking out the truth and breaking down stereotypes. Even if you look at the demographic range on the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it tells you a huge story. We, of course, are focussed on the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition, including honourable Tabuya, honourable Ratu Lalabalavu are, again, obsessed by funds under 'R'. The Requisition to Incur Expenditure (RIE) is done for a purpose, and that has enabled new and large projects and programmes to be tracked and monitored through a documentation, or check and balance system process that ensures funds are spent on the purpose for which it is allocated in line with financial and procurement regulations.

It is not about control by one individual, trust or cash flow or any of the nonsense claimed by the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is about best practice and good financial management.

The RIE has been a feature of every Budget since post-Independence. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, if the Opposition cared to ask the right question or read the Budget amendments, they would know that certain changes were made to the Financial Regulations 2017-2018 Budget to increase delegation to the Permanent Secretary for Economy under Section 9 (a) and (b) of the Finance Instructions, 2010. Honourable Tabuya, you are a lawyer, go and read it! You will find the answer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact is, all allocations under "R" regardless of the total project cost or programme allocation, if a disbursement or requisition application is \$1 million or less, the application or RIE is approved by the Permanent Secretary for Economy, not by the Minister responsible. Only RIE applications above \$1 million are approved by the Minister for Economy. These changes were made to expedite the release of funds to implementing agencies while maintaining accountability. So contrary to the hype created by the Opposition, I hardly ever get to see RIE files, Mr. Speaker, Sir and of course, the protégé of the Leader of Opposition ably-supported by honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not know the difference between freebies and leg-up given to citizens to help them realise their true potential by creating a level playing field.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whichever way the Opposition Members choose to diagnose the Budget, if I can call it that, the Government has put in place policies that no other Government implemented before. Policies that have modernised our economy, improved the lives of ordinary Fijians and raised our nation's international profile. Many in the Opposition, honourable Gavoka and honourable Bulitavu claimed that this is a Budget for the rich. How absurd! How absurd!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the truth is our decade of growth has ensured that every young Fiji has equal opportunity and access to education from Early Childhood Education (ECE) all the way through to high school. That our senior citizens, as elucidated by the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, the senior citizens are most vulnerable are provided a safety net through a pension scheme, insurance and various social assistance programmes. That decade of growth meant more jobs, more incomes, greater access to basic services and better prospects for the future.

Honourable Jale said I have a proclivity with Singapore because I went to school there. I know he may think that all Asians look alike but let me tell you, Hong Kong is very different to Singapore.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want the young people of Fiji to know that this is the calibre of people who actually want to lead you. What intellectual capacity they have? The pugnacious behaviour of these people, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me tell you, Sir, with the way that they are continuing they will get a huge drubbing at the next elections.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It will be such a boom that they will be blown out of oblivion. There are many positive things in the Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of what we have done and what we intend to do.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In growing the Small-to-Medium Enterprise (SMEs)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 62 (4) (a) – “It is out of order for a member, when speaking, to use offensive words against Parliament or another member.”

He is using “pugnacious”, “lack of intellectual capacity” and “silly”. He started off by using “imbecilic” and “stupid” to refer to other honourable Members.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Well you used “imbecilic”. These are offensive words under the Standing Orders. So I am asking that he withdraws those words and use Parliamentary language rather than such offensive words as explained there under Standing Order 62 (4) (a). These are offensive words which describe other members of Parliament; dishonourable words and should not be used here. So, why is he referring to other Parliament Members in a dishonourable, offensive and derogatory terms? Withdraw those!

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- No!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the numbers of name-calling that has been going on during the debate on this thing is a give and take. That is what you have to do and that has been the mood. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are so many positive things in the Budget and what we have done Mr. Speaker, Sir, is grow the SME sector, build digital connectivity, encourage point of sale machines and payment gateways for SMEs and promote the overall digital agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prasad used to talk a lot about the Ease of Doing Business, suddenly he is not talking about it at all because he knows what we have been telling them that we have got the programme that will solve this problem. In the next 18 months, this will be completely solved. He has not mentioned a word about it. It will be a transformational change and these people will be caught up in the dinosaur age and dinosaur thinking. The Opposition claimed that we introduced e-ticketing to make the rich, richer. What an absurd claim! I remember reading an article, I think it was in the *Fiji Times* or *Fiji Sun* that one of the leaders of the other parties that failed to get a seat in Parliament actually made this statement and I think they have caught it off him.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, e-ticketing has in fact made bus companies properly monitor their earnings. We know how much they earn so we know how much they have to pay taxes. We now are able to better serve Fijians under the social welfare system. Government is able to better analyse data and collect her revenue through taxes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they complained about e-ticketing, but these are the very same people when they go overseas, they are quite happy to use e-ticketing in countries like Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition brought about the issue of One Hundred Sands Casino Project, but, little did they mention that this is a private project and Government did not put a single cent in this project. In fact we receive compensation amounting to \$1 million in fines from them because they did not build a casino within the timeline we had agreed. Would they ever contemplate on such an agreement? No, they would not have been able to contemplate that. They talk about borrowing from the EXIM Bank of Malaysia with more than 6 percent when in fact the loan was at interest rate of just about 3 percent. Out of the years US\$40 million loan contract, we have utilised in \$19.5 million and we did not use the balance, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is no cost in this cancellation. So again, honourable Leader of the Opposition, you need to tell your advisors to give you the right information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the facts of the Bainimarama Boom were very clear. Mr. Speaker, Sir, no amount of parading with the Boom washing power in this Parliament would change or disapprove it. The fact is never before (listen to this carefully, please) never before has the Fijian economy grown consecutively for 10 years. Consecutively means year-in year-out; year-in year-out; that is what consecutive means.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This only happened under the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we never saw this under the Ratu Mara Government, the Rabuka Government, the Chaudhary Government and neither during the Qarase Government. Of course, we know that Chaudhary Government did not last for more than one year, some people said they supported the cause but not the method, I think. Some people said that. A decade of

solid growth was only delivered by the Bainimarama Government. This is achieved only by one Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition in his response used manipulated statistics to suit his agenda. Most of his computations of average economic growth rates were incorrect, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These numbers were also regurgitated by other Members of the Opposition who spoke after him. They never bothered to check these numbers through official independent sources, but, relying on incompetent advisors who do not seem to understand the simple difference between real and nominal GDP.

Sadly most of the Opposition Members blindly repeated these figures. Mr. Speaker, Sir, including the former Leader of the Opposition, honourable Kepa, who unfortunately is not here. This is totally irresponsible and yet again another coordinated attempt at economic sabotage. The fact remains that we have doubled the size of the economy in this decade.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Whether you look at the real GDP, nominal GDP or even GDP per capita, we have doubled it.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Why deny us the credit for this exemplary performance? Honourable Tikoduadua says and is blatantly absurd to say that we have inflated GDP so we can borrow more; what an absurd claim.

These figures are independently compiled by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, independently verified by institutions like the RBF, IMF, ADB, World Bank and Credit Rating Agencies like Moody's and Standard & Poor's. This is the same source of data that your Members also use.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we steered the economy through the global financial crisis. We held up economic growth even in the aftermath of *TC Winston*. But, the honourable Leader of the Opposition in his statement blatantly claims that the Bainimarama regime did not face any major crisis. Again false, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition boast that about 3.6 percent growth under his leadership from 1992-1999. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you remove the growth rates for 1992-1999, because he did not serve a full term, the growth average under his leadership is only 2.3 percent. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had one of the strongest periods of growth. The average growth from 2007-2018 is 2.7 percent and not 2.4 percent and that is through the GFC and disasters like *TC Winston*. The average growth from 2010 to 2018 is 3.8 percent. The average growth from 2013 to 2018 stays at 4.5 percent and a much higher 4.9 percent – if you exclude the growth in 2016 post *TC Winston*. This is the boom, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Qereqeretabua should know that our economy is not in the ICU as she mentioned. Unemployment rate is the lowest in 20 years at 4.5 percent, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But, the Opposition want to debunk this, the Opposition talks about foreign reserves as if we are in crisis. The reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that our foreign reserves sits at a comfortable level of \$2 billion over four months in the import cover.

They forgot to mention that after the political *coup* of 1987, foreign reserves fell to a low of \$189 million equivalent to less than two months of imports at a very small economy at that point in time. Neither do they want to talk about the three devaluations; two in 1987 and one in 1998 due to the direct actions of the Leader of the Opposition. The Fijian dollar lost half of its value due to his direct actions and yet he talks about financial stability.

Opposition Members like honourable Tabuya and honourable Nawaikula talk about liquidity being low, but, never talked about the below \$10 million liquidity during the honourable Leader of the Opposition's time as Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of Government debt, it is very unfortunate the issue about Government debt is always politicised by the Opposition without any objective assessment. The Leader of the Opposition and other Members as always repeatedly make reference to nominal debt values to create fear amongst Fijians and other people around us and claim that we are borrowing at unsustainable levels.

But we have been managing our financials sustainably, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are borrowing only to build the assets, to raise the productive capacity of the economy but this is beyond the understanding of the Opposition who simplistically look at the nominal debt stock each year. By all measures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our debt remains on a sustainable path.

We are on track to put the debt to GDP ratio to around 45 per cent in the next three years; lower than 53 per cent in 2006. That is why we are consolidating fiscal policy after rebuild programmes that costed us over \$500 million. That is why we reduced our fiscal deficit from 4.4 percent in 2017-2018 to 3.4 percent in 2018-2019, and now the 2.7 percent in 2019-2020. These are well planned fiscal policies, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Running expansionary policy during times of disaster and consolidating it in its aftermath. It is very sensible, it is logical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, but what the Opposition sees is cut. Honourable Nawaikula signalled that we should hang ourselves that is hypocrisy to the highest level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they complain about high expenditure, when we are doing rebuild after *TC Winston*, but now when we consolidate after rebuild, they do not want us to do that, they want us to spend more. Honourable Nawaikula says that this Government is not only cutting capital expenditure but also operational expenditure; of course, honourable Nawaikula.

We want to curb operating spending and bring greater operational efficiency. We do not want to be like your leader under whose leadership spending on capital expenditure was at a low of 12.3 percent in 1995 and 87.7 percent spent on operational activities. If you run a business, honourable Nawaikula, you would understand that your business would do well if you lessen your operating cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had the best records on spending on capital expenditure including a 33 per cent budget allocated for investment spending in this Budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Nawaikula made blazing statements about liquidity and Government's cash flow. Just baseless claims, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again economic sabotage of the highest order.

They do not realise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on a serious note, that the damage they do by making such absurd claims. Claims about Government not having enough money, honourable Bulitavu spun some vernacular saying there is not enough money, et cetera. We have enough money, had we not, we would

have increased taxes. Simple as that, but we did not, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We didn't increase our major tax rates. Again I reiterate, the VAT remains at 9 percent.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Corporate tax remains at 20 percent, PAYE threshold remains at \$30,000. We have not cut civil servant's salaries, honourable Nawaikula. Please stop making foolish and uneducated statements at least in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I plead with the Opposition, again, please do not put the economy at risk for your political gain or show voting. Let us have an objective approach to the economy. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that FijiFirst Government has been given unparalleled support by both our multilateral and bilateral partners.

The World Bank has given access to the IDA window which allows the Government to access funding at zero interest rates with an extended repayment term for 40 years. We have been getting overwhelming support from our traditional partners like Australia, New Zealand and also there has been profound interest shown by the French Government through the Development Bank to fund the Nadi River Rehabilitation Programme. The French Development Bank has never gone to a non-French territory.

European Investment Bank and the Indian Government to advance our policy priorities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and of course now, Australia through the AIFFP. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Bank and ADB have also agreed to provide a policy based loan to the tune of \$US200 million to redeem the \$US200 million international bond due in October 2020.

We will be able to secure this funding at a very concessional interest rate of just above 3 percent as opposed to the market based interest rate in the offshore market which ranges from 6.625 percent to 9 percent. We anticipate to gain interest saving of \$FJD13 million to \$FJD15 million on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This funding facility also demonstrates the confidence that multilateral partners have in the FijiFirst Government's economic management, financial management and also how credible our reform initiatives are, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many in the opposite side talked about the Help for Homes and the Care Programme which the FijiFirst Government provided in good faith after *Tropical Cyclone Winston; the recent Cyclone Josie, Cyclone Keni*, to help rebuild Fiji and help bring back the lives of ordinary Fijians to normalcy. We care for our people and we always stand ready whether it be in good times, bad times or times of disaster. The FijiFirst Government is there for the people of Fiji and I would want every Fijian to know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that SODELPA and NFP are against these genuine efforts to help Fijians.

They are saying that we should not have spent on Help for Homes, Home Care, Farm Care, Lease Care and other initiatives. What I was saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my Budget Address is that while we have gone far and beyond what any other Government has ever done to assist our fellow Fijians, we will take appropriate measures if there is misuse and abuse. We all need to do our bit as responsible citizens. The Opposition, of course, twisted government's genuine care for the people to suit their own shallow and self-centred agenda.

Mr. Speaker Sir that is the reason why the people of Fiji have made them sit on the opposite bench and gave FijiFirst under the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister, the Government. The doom in 2014, doom in 2018 and it will be kaboom in 2022. That is the Bainimarama Boom, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The 2019-2020 Budget is well-thought out, it was designed to ensure that the future of Fiji is safeguarded. We have been consistent with our economic and financial policies contrary to the speculation from the Opposition and this is a responsible Budget.

We have offered attractive tax incentives to ensure that private sector investments continue to flourish. More jobs are created and empowering ordinary Fijians. We have smartly crafted our expenditure policies. We are committed to our promise of fiscal consolidation. We announced this in 2016-2017 but balancing with the need to ensure adequate funding for inclusive development.

We still have Free Education, we are still directing funding for Infrastructure Development, we are still putting in lots of resources for better health and medical services, access to electricity, water and social protection. We are bringing greater operational efficiency ensuring adequate returns for our investment, ensuring value for money and cutting abuse and wastage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I round off very quickly, the Opposition selectively talks about decline in some of the commodity-based sectors which they themselves are directly responsible for including the struggles we face in the sugarcane industry. Afterall, the honourable Nawaikula, as you know, was instrumental in going around telling people not to renew leases back in the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition Members, including the honourable Kuridrani again brought in the racial twist to our continuous support to the sugar industry.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A Point of Order

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I stand on the Point of Order 81 - Misrepresentation. It is a misrepresentation to say that I was responsible for non-renewal of leases, totally wrong. I am entitled to correct that under Standing Order 81.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Standing Order 81- Response to misrepresentation:

“81(1) A member who has spoken to a question may speak again, at the discretion of the Speaker, to offer an explanation of some material part of his or her speech that has been misrepresented, misquoted, or misunderstood.”

And not only that, and if I may add to that, also the honourable Minister said that I said that there will be staff cuts. It is totally wrong, I did not say that. I said there would be, that is from the Budget.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Salary cuts, I have already said it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And I still challenge the Ministers to explain to the public what would be the implication of that to their staff. That is basically what I said.

HON. SPEAKER.- The honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. The Opposition Members including the honourable Kuridrani again brought in the racial twist to our continued support of the sugarcane industry. But the fact of the matter is that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have never seen budgetary allocations through the racial lenses, not under the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on this note, let me point out something very fundamental which the Opposition is ignorant about as they are still caught in the past. Many still think Fiji is an agricultural economy and declines in certain agricultural products like dairy and timber means the entire economy is not doing well and we are doomed. This is totally incorrect, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The primary sector accounts for around 10 percent of the economy because other sectors have grown and dominate the Fijian economy like construction, wholesale, retail, manufacturing, tourism, real estate, transport, ICT and the financial sector. They in fact account almost 90 percent of our economy and 80 percent of our formal employment. We are not in the 1980s, we are in the 21st century in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with a much more diversified economic base and many other economic sector apart from just agriculture, and it is the responsibility of every government to ensure that we have diversified the economic base because if one gets it, you can rely on the others, if two gets it you can rely on the others, that is what you call “mitigating your risks”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is incorrect for honourable Kuridrani to say that over 50 percent of those employed are in the agricultural sector or to say that Fiji is an agricultural dependent economy. Most of you need to update your statistical database and better understand the structure of the economy. Please, try and understand this. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition also seems to harp about our economy being consumption-driven, but any service driven-economy, like Fiji, with over one-third of the economy driven by tourism, will have consumption-related expenditure growth, driving growth, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is nothing bad about this. What is bad about tourists spending more money in Fiji in accommodation, at restaurants, at sightseeing, at other amenities? They need to understand all these fundamental issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, let me say, this is the Budget for the future of Fiji. This Budget will protect our development gains, the decade of growth under the Bainimarama Boom. This Budget will ensure macro-economic stability, this will ensure discipline. This Budget will help the ordinary Fijians, businesses in every sector of the economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This Budget is for everyone, every segment of our economy and every Fijian. It is for the empowerment of ordinary Fijians, for our youths, the elderlies, disabled and vulnerable, for the future of this country, for stability and continuity, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This Budget is for businesses to flourish. We have provided a very stable environment, consistency in policies, we have kept taxes low, we will continue to make doing business easier through investment in the ICT to enable businesses process improvements. We are providing the enabling infrastructure and human resources. We want to partner with them and take Fiji forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Opposition needs to understand the meaning of frugal spending and tightening Budget. It is not austerity as such. With the assistance of the World Bank, we have undertaken a medium term expenditure framework. We want to ensure maximum return for our taxpayer funds. I announced in the Budget that we will be bringing various amendments to the FMA, bring to this Parliament that the Government needs to more regularly now provide the budgetary frameworks which have never been done. We have to table it in Parliament. We have to table the economics position of Government, at least 20 days before Elections, before writs are issued. All of these are about accountability, you should be happy with that. We are creating a lot more transparency. If you go to the Ministry of Economy website, you will find every updated figure on the Economy. Please, go to that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, likewise we want to ensure allocating with efficiency and value for money, “We walk the talk.” We do not shy away from making tough decisions with wider consideration of public interest. Of course, there is always room to improve. Once a policy is implemented, we should progressively review that, whether internal objectives are met, accordingly you should be ready to re-collaborate. If it is not working, we are brave enough and humble enough to say, “Let us fix it up.” We announce that we, for example, recognise some of the issues with FRCS. We announced in the Budget that we are going to put the Committee in place to review the business processes. We announced in respect of the e-ticketing, we are going to look at that and how we need to fix it up. We have been monitoring for the past couple of years, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you link it with the policy priorities of the Government and take away any facts or sharpen the policy direction without compromising the philosophical basis of the Government. The philosophical basis of this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to empower ordinary Fijians through a transparent system, better accountability, better management of financing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we are ready to make the tough decisions, we are ready to be creative, we have always been creative and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Budget of 2019-2020. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, your Point of Order on Standing Order 81. You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I repeat that I wish to correct a misinterpretation and misquotation that was made in relation to me, and I am entitled to do that under Standing Order 81. I was misquoted, the Honourable Minister said that I said that there will be cuts in the Civil Service staff. I did not say that. I said there were cuts in the budget relating to established staff allocation and wage earners allocation and I challenged all the honourable Ministers that side again to explain to their workers what the implication of that would be in relation to the recruitment next year, especially those who are coming out of colleges. I was also misquoted, secondly, when the honourable Minister said that I was responsible for the non-renewal of leases in 1997. That is important, so that it goes to Hansard and it is corrected. Thank you, honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think the point is taken, and we will move on. Honourable Members, we will suspend proceedings now so that dinner can be served. After dinner, we will proceed to the Committee of Supply. I think lot of people need sustenance at the moment, and including the Speaker. So we adjourn for dinner for an hour. When we return we go into the Committee of Supply.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.11 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.12 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off before we adjourned for dinner.

Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 99(3), the 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill 2019 (Bill No. 9 of 2019), has now been read a second time and without any question being put, the Bill and the Estimates now stand referred to the Committee of Supply.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- A Bill for an Act to appropriate a sum of Three Billion, Four Hundred and Thirty Four Million, Four Hundred and Seven Thousand and Eight Hundred and Ninety Two Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July, 2020 (Bill No. 7 of 2019).

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider each Head in the Budget Estimates. It is envisaged that this process would be completed on Thursday, after which the Committee of Supply will then vote on the Schedules and Clauses of the 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill 2019.

Now, for the information of all honourable Members, we will attempt to complete debate and vote on Heads 1 to 15 before we adjourn tonight.

For the Committee stage, I will sit at the Table with the Secretary-General and Members will refer to me as Mr Chair. The mace will also be placed on the lower bracket, signifying that the Parliament is in committee.

Honourable Members, the Secretary-General will announce each Head separately. Members may then stand to speak on that Head and you may speak more than once on each Head. Honourable Members, please take note that in some of the Heads there will be several programmes and activities listed. I remind honourable Members that we will deal with these progressively. For instance Head No. 21, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts has nine Programmes and several Activities. If we have reached Programme 5 Activity 2, we will proceed to Programme 6, and I remind honourable Members that we will not regress to the Programmes and Activities that we have already covered. I hope that is clear that is just to make clarifications because there is always a tendency for people wanting to go back. Once we have gone through, we will keep going.

Now honourable Members, still on the Heads. You may also move amendments to the Estimates in that Head. If a Member does move an amendment, debate will be on the Head and the amendment as well. At the end of the debate, the amendment or amendments will be voted on first and this will then be followed by a vote on the Head.

Honourable Members, for ease of process during the Committee of Supply, please note that the amendment slips have been placed on your tables. I ask you to please write your proposals and amendments legibly.

On that note, please be reminded that amendments in Committee of Supply are limited to those permitted in Standing Order 100 (2), this is either an increase, decrease or removal of the item or sub-head from the Head being debated.

Finally, honourable Members, the debate, if any should be confined to the Head, sub-head or item referred to. Any debate must be relevant, concise and not repetitious. In any case, the debates must be relatable to the Head being debated.

There are Heads 1 to 50, which we need to get through and therefore I will be vigilant and order Members to cease speaking if I feel the rule for the Committee process is being breached.

Honourable Members, I ask for your cooperation.

In Committee:

Head 1 – Office of the President

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. MAJOR GEN. (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chair Sir, Head 1-1-1 Expenditure Group 3 on Overseas Travel. I move that Head 1, Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3 be increased by \$80,500 to total \$200,000 in respect of overseas travel.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The amendment has been moved, is there a seconder?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chair, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A clarification Mr. Chair, on Head 1, Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 1. We still have not started with SEG 1, a clarification Mr. Chair, the increase of SEG 1 allocation from \$786,000 to \$821,000. Can you just clarify what is the reason behind the increase, is there going to be an increase in staff, increase in salary, OMRS?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could Mr. Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have the floor Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, Sir, it is actually to meet a shortfall, what we found that under SEG 1, the Office of the President had vired funds from other SEGs to meet the shortfall in their SEG 1. So now we are giving them adequate funding so they will be able to meet all their salaries and wages from SEG 1 itself, so that is for the increase. It is to cater for the salaries of 24 established staff.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A clarification too Mr. Chairman, still with that clarification, given that last year, the honourable Minister for Economy had stated that there were two additional Assistant Domestic Coordination Officers and one Assistant Landscape Officer. Are they included in the new increase or?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You have the established staff and also in SEG 2, you have the wage earners. So you can see the wage earners has increased by \$10,000, that includes the salaries for 4 Government Wage Earners in SEG 2, and SEG 1 includes the salaries for 24 Established staff.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A clarification regarding SEG 1. So the 24 staff were there previously, and now it has been regularised with this increase.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, there were some shortfalls in some of the salaries so obviously some people have received pay rises, et cetera, and so this will ensure that they have got adequate funding.

Sorry, just in respect of the landscape officers et cetera, that is also included in that too, the new ones you referred to.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Chair. Just a clarification. In the Budget Kit, it states that \$250,000 is allocated for interior finishing, SEG 8 (3). Why is it under Head 50 on requisition?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Because it is major capital works, and it goes to the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU), because the work is outsourced. As you know the Office of the President does not have a construction unit there so it goes to the CIU. You see other major constructions through CIU too, for example, the school rebuild.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Alright. I am just curious because I thought the President's budget goes straight to

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Budget Kit obviously talks about the different sectors. For example, in education. If you see the education sector, you will see TELS et cetera, but because TELS is a loan, you will see it in Head 50. But when you look at the contribution towards the education sector, obviously it is put in one page, the same with the President's Office.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any other further comments? I will now invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chair, I move that Activity Group be increased by \$80,500 to a total of \$200,000. This is drawing from the 2017 Auditor-General's Report. The travel budget had a savings of about \$5,440. I believe, Sir that it is inappropriate that His Excellency's constitutional role would be limited simply because of the savings in travel. And we would like to see His Excellency carry out all the duty travel he is invited to undertake, and that the allocation be taken up to \$200,000; a rounded figure.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could, Mr. Chair, Sir, just provide clarification. The honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about SEG 3. SEG 3 has a number of different components. You have two components on travel, one is Domestic Travel and the other one is Overseas Travel.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Overseas travel, Mr. Chair, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Overseas Travel, Mr. Chair, Sir, there is a reduction of \$200,000 compared to this year. This year as in 2018-2019, His Excellency the President had \$600,000 allocated, and then this year in the 2019-2020, we are reducing it to \$400,000. But the domestic travel which you see in SEG 3, if you look at Estimates on Page 13, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If you look at SEG 3, Page 13 where you have the description.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- SEG 3, sorry.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- SEG 3, you have got travel \$119,500, that is for domestic travel. That amount has not been reduced.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Not been reduced.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That has not been reduced compared to 2018-2019. The amount that has been reduced is the overseas travel from \$600,000 to \$400,000.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, that is the one I thought we should change and increase so that it can be facilitated for his duty travel overseas.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, just for clarification, I think the honourable Attorney-General was right. I think the honourable Leader of the Opposition meant local travel because he said \$80,500, that will add to \$119,500 to make it to \$200,000 at the end.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could, Mr. Chairman, Sir, just for clarification, honourable Leader of the Opposition, we have obviously had discussions with His Excellency's Office. So the \$119,500 is maintained because they do use that money.

The overseas travel which is \$600,000, they believe that the overseas engagements for this upcoming year will not be as much and, indeed, there was some underutilisation of it. So as a result of the underutilisation and, indeed, the fact that they will not travel as much, we have reduced it to \$400,000; that is why.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification on Personal Emoluments on SEG 1, does that include....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Let us finish this.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- I am addressing the Chairman.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is your Leader's motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The amendment has been withdrawn.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So, he has withdrawn that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So the amendment has been withdrawn.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, just on the clarification on SEG 1 in terms of Personal Emoluments, does that include the salary of the President?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is for the 24 Established staff.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- It does not include him.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, just a clarification in terms of the Overseas Travel allowance that you have stated from \$600,000 to \$400,000, but the Budget Kit states that it is only for His Excellency's travel in the Pacific Island countries.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, where are you reading that from?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The Budget Kit 2019-2020 talks about Overseas travel.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I recommend, honourable Member, to read Page 13 because we are doing the Estimates. And if you read the Estimates, if you look at paragraph 3, it says that he promotes Fiji by visiting other countries for special occasions, et cetera.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- My point is that, given that the reason here is for His Excellency to travel only around the Pacific Island countries. This is Page 6; the last bulletpoint.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That allocation that \$400,000, it is same thing.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, but, it does not say "only Pacific Island countries". It says, "Pacific Island countries", but he travels to other places, as you know he does visit the troops, et cetera. But, Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would urge the honourable Members to look at the Estimates which is the subject of debate, not any other document. There is no, "*areh*", please look at the Estimates, read the Estimates.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It will make our work easier if you look at the Estimates, not any other publication. Estimates, that is what we are dealing with.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Chairman, I seek a clarification.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- On Head 1, Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 5 - Service Medals (\$120,000). There has been a decrease in relation to SEG 5. Does that mean that there are fewer medals that we expect to be given next year because of the reduction?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, Mr. Chairman, Sir, if I could enlighten the honourable Member. You will see that Soft Furnishings, Minor Equipment, Stores, Service Medals, Ceremonial and Hospitality Expenses has had no reduction, nor has Directory Expenses nor Fiji College of Honour Expenses nor has Training. The only reduction that we have had is in the OHS Expenses because it is aligned to the expenditure trend, and the medical expenses has also been aligned to the expenditure trend. So they are the two areas where we had reductions, but all the others have been maintained at the same level.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Happy with that? Honourable Members, there being no further comments, Parliament will now vote on Head 1.

The Question is:

That the amount of Head 1 - Office of the President, be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- As no Member opposes, Head 1 is agreed to unanimously.

Head 1 agreed to.

Head 2 – Office of the Prime Minister

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

Honourable Members, there has been an amendment that Head 2 be increased by \$500,000 in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 with respect to the Fiji Mahogany Trust.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask a general question because I think it will help us not to get into the details. I looked at the website, the last Annual Report for the Prime Minister’s Office was 2014. Can we have some clarification as to why the other Annual Reports are not available or are they available, or they have been tabled in Parliament?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I do not have any information with me at this point in time. I am wholly focussed on the Estimates.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Because it is important for us to know why the Annual Reports are not made available in this Budget.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, not all the Ministries are up to-date. Some, of course, are up to-date, some are not, and I am sure in time to come, all the Ministries will be up to-date.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The amendment by honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, is there a seconder to this amendment?

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- I beg to second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Another amendment by the honourable Mitieli Bulanauca that Head 2 be increased, and it does not have an amount here.

An amendment by the honourable Sitiveni Rabuka that Head 2 be increased by \$1.045 million in Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 6 with respect to Rotuma Island Council, Rabi Island Council, Kioa Island Council, and Grant to Melanesian *Vasu-i-Taukei*. Is there a seconder to this motion?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There is another motion by the honourable Sitiveni Rabuka that \$4 million be left out of Head 2, Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 10.

There is another amendment by the honourable Niko Nawaikula that Head 2 be decreased by \$1 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3 with respect to Overseas Travel – Prime Minister (\$1,200,000).

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman just a clarification on Programme 1, Activity 1. There is a reduction in SEG 1 - Established Staff from \$2.1 million to \$1.9 million. Last year there was an increase because of an additional position of Policy Analyst. Can we just get a confirmation and clarification from the honourable Minister on whether this reduction will impact on that additional position that was created last year?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it would not because there has been a number of vacancies that were not filled, and this is the point that I was trying to make in the address that I gave. I wish you had come to the workshop, we would have explained it to you.

There are certain Ministries where there are a number of vacancies that had not been filled. So, what we have said to the Ministry is, to be realistic whether those actual vacancies can be filled or do you want them filled at all. So, the Ministries are actually working on some of the positions, they are, in fact, consolidating. So, people would be paid higher salaries but the number of positions will actually be reduced. So, it does cater for that.

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- Is the Established number of staff related to this SEG?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, there are 47 Established staff positions, of which 35 positions are filled and 12 are vacant.

Then the other one is in SEG 2 which is also a remuneration cost. They have 20 Government Wage Earners in that, out of which 14 positions are filled and 6 are vacant.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just a further clarification to SEG 1, Mr. Chairman, in the terms of the positions that are paid from there. Does this also include the executive positions; the Permanent Secretary and the relevant Ministers in the office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, the Permanent Secretary's salary as you will see is in the Public Service Commission (PSC) because the employer for the Permanent Secretary is the PSC, which is an independent body. So the salaries for them comes through the PSC allocation.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- And the Ministerial position?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Ministerial position, yes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- All right.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Bulanauca?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, my request in the form from Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 - Fiji Mahogany Trust (\$250,000). My request there is for an increase by \$500,000. I propose that and it has been seconded.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can you speak to your motion?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My motion is an extra \$500,000 to be allocated to Fiji Mahogany Trust. The sum of \$250,000 that has already been allocated there is for the administration of the Trust. This extra \$500,000 that I am proposing in the form of a motion is as a revolving fund to be available for the resource owners to take a loan from in order to enter into the mahogany business activities that is available within the mahogany industry. That is the request that is being requested here of any amount up to \$500,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, could you speak to your motion on Head 2 be increased by \$1.045 million in Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 6.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. The allocation of \$100,000 for the Grant to Melanesian *Vasu-i-Taukei*. We cannot be proclaiming to the world that we welcome people from Kiribati, when our own people from Rotuma, Rabi and Kioa and our own Melanesian *vasu* have had to make do with the same pitiful allocations of the past. We have not done well for them. I believe the plight of the Vilavou community seeking proper rubbish collection, walkways and lighting, they have been waiting for a long time, Mr. Chairman. They have been part of our development like all the other communities and I move that Head 2, Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 6 be increased by \$1.045 million in respect of Rotuma Island Council, Rabi Island Council, Kioa Island Council and Grant to Melanesian *Vasu-i-Taukei*. Thank you, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, just to perhaps guide the honourable Leader of the Opposition. When you make such a recommendation of \$1.045 million, you have to say how you are going to break it down because you can see that SEG 6 actually is made up of the four different organisations. So you need to say how you want it allocated. You cannot just say \$1.045 million for SEG 6, then how you are going to break it down, are you going to give it all to Rotumans or *Vasu-i-Taukei*, et cetera.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, Sir, just to clarify it for the honourable Leader of the Opposition, this is the administrative cost of these Councils. It does not include the development cost. So the Ministry of Provincial Development, et cetera are carrying out projects on these islands. So, for example, Rotuma has just had a new runway built so the ATR72 can land. That money is not coming from here, it is in a separate allocation or it comes from AFL. Same thing with Rabi building a jetty or whatever, so I think it is misleading to say that we need to develop these islands and as a result of which we need to allocate \$1.045 million. It is actually just the administrative cost of the Rabi Council, Rotuma Island Council, Kioa Island Council; it is just the council itself.

If I could have the liberty, Mr. Chairman, Sir, the honourable Bulanauca mentioned about the Mahogany Trust. Again this is just the administrative cost of the actual Trust itself. In respect to the activities of the Trust, that is a separate matter. Honourable Bulanauca himself, actually his company was issued a mahogany license. So it did not stop him from actually getting a mahogany license. This actual fund is just for the administrative cost of that Trust, not for development purposes. Just a clarification, so you understand what it is for.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to stick with the motion. The allocation is probably on a pro-rata basis depending on the need that you have already communicated to the Office of the Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You have to suggest it, we cannot do it. You have to give the exact amounts according to the Estimates. Unless you want to equally divide it by 4.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Divide it by 4.

(Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Yes, just a clarification Mr. Chairman, Sir and that is on Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3 on Overseas Travel of the Prime Minister which has reduced from last year. It was \$1.5 million, this year it is \$1.2 million. Can we get an explanation from the honourable Minister whether the honourable Prime Minister this year will reduce his travelling? What is the reason for that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You mean for, when you say this year, you mean 2019-2020?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Yes. In 2018-2019, it was \$1.5 million and 2019-2020 it is \$1.2 million; dropped by \$300,000.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There are two reasons. Given the very high profile of the honourable Prime Minister, in particular, in the climate change space, we are getting a number of his trips that actually get funded by various organisations. So, for example, if he goes to the various UN meetings or whatever, they invite him to speak, so they generally tend to fund it. Of course not all the trips are funded, so taking that into account and take into account his overseas schedule for 2019-2020 and having discussions, we have reduced the travel allocation by \$300,000 which is a combination of two things: one is that the demand is not as much and when there is a demand, sometimes it gets funded.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, on Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 4 - Upkeep of PM's Residence - (\$20,000). In the last Budget it was \$40,000. What is the reason of that decrease?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- In the 2018-2019 Budget it was \$40,000 and for this Budget it is \$20,000; decreased.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As you also know that the honourable Prime Minister's residence has been upgraded also. So obviously there are new facilities in place, et cetera so we do not need to have that much money allocated for the maintenance of it, that is why. It has been cut down from \$40,000 to \$20,000.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Minister, clarification on

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please go through the Chair.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Sorry. Mr. Chair, Sir, I seek clarification from the honourable Minister for Economy on the \$10,000 allocation for Advertising Costs under SEG 5.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, which Programme and which Activity?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 5 - Advertising Costs (\$10,000). There is already a \$100,000 allocation for advertising under Head 16, Programme 3, Activity 1, SEG 5 which is in the Ministry for Communications which obviously suggests that the Ministry of Communication coordinates all the Government advertising for consistency in messaging. So, could you just give more information as to why the Prime Minister's Office has its own advertising cost if it is already covered under the Ministry that takes care of Government advertising?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, just stick to what we do. Do not go ahead to Head 16. Just advertising in the Prime Minister's Office.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I could provide a clarification, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the honourable Member will note that all the Ministries have some form of advertising allocation. The general advertising in the Ministry of Communications is always for general advertisements. Sometimes a Ministry may want to advertise, for example, they may have this particular project or they may want to advertise in the papers, for example, for a particular position. When the Ministry has actually advertised for positions, they have to pay for it so they need to be funded for that. So, they advertise a vacancy in the office. You will generally find that a lot of the Ministries, they will all have an advertising cost built into it depending on the Ministry, but it is a generally a provision made for it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, could you speak to your motion that \$4 million be left out of Head 2 Programme 1 Activity 2, SEG 10.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is hardly a small grant, Mr. Chairman. In 2017, the Auditor-General's Report said that you did not have the information on the allocation of that grant although he had audited the China Grant Trust Fund, Taiwan Grant Trust Fund and Mahogany Trust Fund. If this allocation cannot be audited, I believe, Mr. Chairman that it should be given to some worthy and transparent programmes or projects. Even if it was taken out of that and reallocated to the various development areas, the motion is that to be taken out of Head 2, Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 10.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, just to provide clarification, as the Leader of the Opposition will see that the grant this year for this particular SEG was \$9 million. We have significantly cut it down by \$5 million to \$4 million. This particular small grant project for the honourable Prime Minister's Office, it does get a number of requests. So if you look at the expenditure, in particular, post-2016 where on his visits, a number of communities did ask for specific projects to be built. So it has been from building classrooms to giving villagers boats with outboard motor engines for small projects. There is no doubt that there has been very useful purposes for this. We also understand that once the Auditor-General may have made some remarks according to it, these reports once the Prime Minister's Annual Report does come out, you will see a detailed breakdown of where the expenditures actually have gone to.

So, I would recommend that we maintain this. You can see we significantly cut this but it does help ordinary people in respect to some of the very immediate needs that could be addressed through that and we recommend that we keep this particular grant. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Can we give our comments too on the motion, Mr. Chair? I agree with the motion to totally remove this from Head 2 of the Budget, given that most of the activities that are catered under this, for example, the upgrade of school buildings, kindergartens, classrooms, teacher's quarters, playgrounds and sports grounds, walkways, footpaths, evacuation centres - are also in other ministries, do not need to be centrally located in the Prime Minister's Office and given that the comments by the Auditor-General that there is still no report on it. When this kind of allocations are centralised in the Prime Minister's Office, it is open to abuse.

That is why all those activities that should come under this should go to the various line ministries that look after Water Projects, Solar Projects, Rural Electrification Projects because time and again, we see people, even they have come to us, when the Prime Minister goes to a village and someone asks for a kindergarten or desk or chair, and they follow up, after follow up, they even come right to Suva to the Prime Minister's Office, still no response. If this could be centralised and be administered by the rightful ministries that is the reason why I support the motion to totally remove this allocation.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Could I respond to that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think the honourable Member has contradicted himself. The point of this is, of course, for some very immediate needs. If you look at most of the expenditure, in particular for construction that has been carried under this fund is being done by the RFMF Engineers.

As you would know, honourable Member, that some of the remotest parts, it is very difficult to get contractors out in those places and sometimes there have been very immediate needs and most of the major projects under this grant has been conducted or carried out by the RFMF Engineers. The funds are actually paid to the RFMF Engineers from this particular allocation.

Like I said, some of them are quite small, some of them have been large but the Prime Minister's Office have also informed us that you will find some more delineation and demarcation within this particular small grants going forward. I think you have seen a number of changes. This is why we have actually reduced it from \$9 million to \$4 million and there will be a lot more focus on the smaller grants, some of the larger grants, I think they happen because of *TC Winston*, you know a lot of them sometimes fell through the cracks.

This is why we have reduced the grant and it is not in any way trying to take over the work of other ministries but there is, of course, the honourable Prime Minister, as you know, does travel quite significantly. I would suggest that he is the most travelled Prime Minister in Fiji, he has gone to the remotest parts on horseback, et cetera, so sometimes there are demands for them and he does attend to it through these particular funds.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Member.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think this is a very important motion. If what we are told, if the Auditor General's Office has not audited this allocation before, it is not about where these grants sit,

whether they sit in the Prime Minister's Office or any other ministry but what is important is, we must have accountability and transparency about the use of these funds.

If the Auditor General cannot lay his hands on the auditing of the use of that grant, then it is a serious issue and while it is being reduced from \$9 million to \$4 million, I am not convinced, unless we have the audit. It would be unwise for us to approve this allocation and I therefore support that we take that allocation out.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have your

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Chair, I have a motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Your motion – Head 2 be decreased by \$1 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3 with respect to Overseas Travel.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Will you speak to it?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I second the motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now, I will speak to my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- My motion is seeking a decrease in relation to Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3, this is relating to the Prime Minister's Overseas Travel. The amount that is allocated now is \$1.2 million (\$1,200,000). As confirmed by the honourable Attorney-General, \$1.5 million was allocated to him last year so this is a very small decrease in my view, \$300,000. Going back to the audit, of course, if there has been an audit as the honourable Attorney-General says, some are paid by overseas and some are paid by us. It would have been clear how much is actually used by us because I suspect that a lot of overseas travels by the Prime Minister is paid for by overseas sponsors.

The second point is that, we have finished COP 23 so therefore, the Prime Minister is not expected to be travelling more. Thirdly, I disagree that we should have a Prime Minister who has a high-profile and should be travelling all the time when we all agree that everyone has to tighten their belts. We do not have any money and it should start from the top, the reduction of \$200,000 is not enough. It should be reduced more so that we have a Prime Minister who looks after Fiji and who does not look after the world. That is my reason and I invite all of you from the other side to, please, agree. You do not even have enough money. You have been forced to tighten your belts. Everybody should tighten their belts and it should start from the top and one of things we should stop is the Prime Minister going overseas. He should stay here and look after us. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Any further comments?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, Sir, I think the honourable Nawaikula is making a couple of points there. One of them is that, he is actually questioning whether the amount allocated is too much and he is saying that because of the reduced travel and because of the fact that we have some of the trips that are sponsored, he is right. There is a combination of factors: one is that you have

sponsored trips and one, of course, the travel requirements are not as much in particular during COP and immediately post-COP. That is why the reduction has taken place.

It does not, of course, mean that the PM is travelling all the time. I think it is a bit of, you know, that kind of statement is losing its currency. He is one Prime Minister, I do not want to get into this that knows more about the Fijian people than any other Prime Minister, given the fact that he has travelled to almost everywhere. So let us not get into that space. I think the fact is that we have reduced his overseas travel.

The fact of the matter is also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that other travel allotments have also been reduced. For example, the local travel which the honourable Member has not referred to, has been also reduced by \$26,800. There is an overall reduction in terms of the travel and this is adequate. Of course, these are all, as the title says, they are estimates, because it may well be that if we get more sponsored trips, the \$1.2 million will not be used, for example, the Secretary-General has invited the honourable Prime Minister to a number of gatherings. When he does go there sometimes the UN picks it up or some other organisation picks it up.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any comments on the other Programmes?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Comments, Mr. Chairman, Sir, in regards to Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 5 – Public Outreach and Consultation. In the last Budget, it was \$100,000 and this Budget, it is \$50,000, what is the reason for the decrease?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, Mr. Chairman, one of the things that we are doing is also doing a lot of inter-ministerial work. So you will see a lot of the Ministries are now travelling together, as you would see that, for example, the Ministry of Provincial Development has this outreach where they were recently up in *Keasi*.

So you have a number of the Ministries that take the services, and the costs actually are split amongst the Ministries. In this particular case, this amount, if you see, Mr. Chairman, Sir, has in fact been transferred across from SEG 7 and is now sitting here at \$50,000.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to make a suggestion in order that we can move faster. We do not go to and fro, when we come to each Activity, we have a time limited for comments and clarification.

And soon after that we go to the voting and get it over and done with and go to the second one, because on this one, we have been here for about half an hour or nearly 1 hour.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, I am only suggesting, the honourable Speaker is the Chairman, it is up to him.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, you have heard that suggestion. If there are no further comments regarding this Head, we will go to the vote on the amendments.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, just on Programme 3, Activity 1 – Immigration Office. In SEG 5 – Passports \$500,000 allocation under ‘R’.

The honourable Minister for Economy would remember that in the last Budget, I actually asked him as there was an allocation of about \$300,000 and when I asked him about the biometric verification system on e-passport, he said that they are working on it and it will continue in the new financial year. My question is, what amount of work was completed since the last Budget? I seek that clarification from the honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Member, which SEG are you looking at?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Programme 3, Activity 1, SEG 5 - Passports (\$500,000).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3, Activity 1, SEG 5.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have engaged a German company to undertake the electronic passport. The German company, I am probably not very good at pronouncing German words, but it is called, "Muhlbauer ID Services GmbH", to undertake the electronic passport issues and solution for Fiji, and provide blankly passport booklets at the cost of €\$3.4 million for a period of six years. What it will actually do, Mr. Chairman, Sir, it will ensure that these passports will have the latest biometrics and the latest technology in it, as mentioned it has got the chips. I have seen the quality of the passports, and some of you may know the New Zealand passport. If you look at the cover of the New Zealand passport, as much as you try and bend it does not get bent, so it is quite durable. These passports as highlighted, the honourable Prime Minister mentioned in his budget address will be able to have e-passport gateway. So generally if you go to Sydney, you will see Australian citizens coming back to Australia, they simply just place their passports on those machines and they go through.

We will now have the capacity to do that. It also helps with border control and of course security. It does also tie in just an ancillary comment, the honourable Prime Minister also mentioned that we are looking at reviewing our Immigration Laws too. For example, make citizenships a lot more not as easy as it is now. The honourable Leader of the Opposition's time, Minister's had the discretion to give citizenship. We took away the discretionary powers, but we still believe that the time requirement is still very short. There will be some change in that. That is what we have done, and the allocation of course is half a million dollars, because we have already completed the payment for Year 1 of the project.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So that is not for the actual passports, because what we are told by people who are applying for new passports they are getting stickers on their old passports because we have run out of passports. I am hoping that this allocation is also for new passports.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No it is. Like I said, it is for the new passports. The reason why they had the stickers for the extension was because we did not want to issue them with the old passport, you know the old system passports, just to get extension. So the moment we get the new passports, they can make that switch to the new passports.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Bulanauca?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, Sir, Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 7 on Former Prime Ministers' Benefit \$170,000. Just need a clarification, Sir, on the sudden drop from \$506,000 in 2017 to 2018 to \$170,000. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. The \$170,000, there are three (3) beneficiaries that have got this, which is the honourable Leader of the Opposition is a beneficiary of this, and so is Laisenia Qarase, who is a beneficiary of this. As you know under the specific Act, once you are Prime Minister and you have served for the full term, you are entitled to, for example, a pension, you are entitled to the payment of the motor vehicle, the drivers salary, and I think you are entitled (from memory) for payment of two other staff.

So those are the entitlements and it comes to the Cabinet Office, the payments are made through the Cabinet Office. Things like telephone Bills, et cetera, all come through here, and they can make claims, and medical too.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That being the case. Honourable Usamate?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I would like to make a suggestion. I think I agree with the honourable Nawaikula, rather than all this yo-yoing back and forth, that you have a bit of order, a bit of process. Let us go activity by activity, finish one and move on. Because as I said in my speech, we need process, we need system. We are not a bunch of yoyos, we kept going back and forth; that is my suggestion, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.-Mr. Chairman, I actually find that quite insulting from the Member. I mean he gives a lecture, the Honourable Nawaikula just said, what we going to do. But again we hear him trying to lecture the Opposition, please don't.

HON. J. USAMATE.-I agree with the honourable Nawaikula's suggestion, rather than just jumping back and forth. I agree with him totally.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on the amendment(s).

This question is on the first amendment proposed by honourable Sitiveni Rabuka that \$4 million be left out of Head 2, Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 10).

Those in favour say "Ayes", those against say "Noe".

(Chorus of "Ayes" and "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.-The "Noes" have it.

The question is on the second amendment proposed by honourable Mitieli Bulanauca that Head 2 be increased by \$500,000 in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 with respect to Fiji Mahogany Trust.

Those in favour say "Ayes", those against say "Noe".

(Chorus of "Ayes" and "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- The "Noes" have it.

The question is on the third amendment proposed by honourable Sitiveni Rabuka that Head 2 be increased by \$1.045 million in Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG (6) with respect to Rotuma Island Council, Rabi Island Council, Kio Island Council, and Grant to Melanesian Vasu-i-Taukei.

Those in favour say “Aye” and those against say “Noe”.

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- The “Noes” have it.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think the numbers on the Government side can yell a bit louder than us, maybe we should have the voting.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the last amendment is proposed by honourable Niko Nawaikula that Head 2 be decreased by \$1 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, and SEG (3), with respect to Overseas Travel.

Those in favour say “Aye”, those against say “Nay”.

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The “Noes” have it.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, some have just come awake. We have done the amendments, we will now vote on the Head. The question is that the amount of Head 2 - Office of the Prime Minister be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There being opposition, we will now vote.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 26 |
| Noes | : | 22 |
| Not Voted | : | 3 |

The motion is agreed to.

Head 2 agreed to.

Head 3 - Office of the Attorney-General

HON. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for any comments.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I seek clarification based on which I may or may not move a motion. This is in relation to Programme 1, Activity, SEG 5, World Intellectual Property Organisation - (\$6,600), as well as Fiji Intellectual Property Office (\$150,000). Can we get clarification on that allocation and what it is in relation to and its purpose?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will do FIPO first, which is Fiji Intellectual Property Office. It is essentially to make sure that the proper patenting and record of intellectual properties carried out. FIPO conducts investigations that can lead to prosecutions under the Copyright Act and this is to obviously strengthen FIPO's ability to perform this important work.

Honourable Nawaikula as you would also know that we are currently in the process of also bringing to Parliament some laws, you know we have been working on it for a quite some time in respect of various intellectual property pertaining to indigenous property rights, stemming not just from things like medicine et cetera. But FIPO's job is to make sure that we do that, and of course FIPO's work will in fact, the ambit of its work will increase quite significantly once we have these laws presented to Parliament, and once the laws are approved by Parliament. I would suggest that for the time being this is enough funding for FIPO, and then we can increase it in the following year. But we are very keen to ensure that we get these laws in place in this Parliamentary session.

In respect of the World Intellectual Property Organisation, this is the fund for awareness campaign on copyright law. At the moment honourable Nawaikula, you would probably know this, a lot of this would do with for example, the musical rights et cetera that we are focusing on, ECRA does deal in this particular area. I hope that clarifies.

HON. CHAIRMAN.- You have the floor, honourable Member.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just clarification from the honourable Attorney-General on SEG 5, as \$300,000 allocation for drafting laws and then you got \$30,000 for Legal Expert Expenses. I am assuming that legal experts will draft the laws, what is the difference?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Just the legal expenses is for consultation fees to give opinion or assist with such cases against Government sometimes. For example, if we are taken to court from some technological perspective, there may be some telecommunications laws, the breadth of that knowledge does not necessarily exist, so we get opinion work for that.

The other one, of course, is the drafting of laws. Again, you need specialists. So, for example, if the Ministry of Agriculture currently wants to draft a number of new laws in respect to agriculture and various other organisation, fisheries. We sometimes outsource that to get the right people, in particular, who have had a track record of working in that area, so that is the difference

HON. M.R.LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification on SEG 1, there is a reduction in Personal Emoluments. Can we have an explanation or clarification from the honourable Minister? It is from \$5 million to \$4 million.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you. Again, Mr. Chairman, Sir, if you came to the workshop you would have known this. As you note from across Government, there has been a 5 percent reduction all across Government in respect to SEG 1, except for one or two. Again, there is an issue about vacancies that does exist. Some of the vacancies have not been filled for a long period of time but obviously, they do not need to fill those positions. And so there is reduction of \$570,000 as you can see,

so it caters for that. So there is no reduction in salary or in any other negative impact or ramifications for any existing staff.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chairman, I have a follow up question to the question that was just being asked; is there a such thing as the Civil Service Establishment List as we used to have before, where we will know all the positions that are approved for each Ministry, et cetera? Is that still in existence?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the honourable Member was not here in the last Parliament. As you would know that previously when you were perhaps, in Government, each of SEG 1 and SEG 2 always next to it in brackets, the number of established positions. Now, we have got rid of that.

Essentially, we give an envelope to the Permanent Secretary. The Permanent Secretary, by law, is the Chief Accountant for each of the Ministries, not the Minister. So they had been given that envelope, so within that envelope they obviously can have a number of positions, it is up to them, but they cannot exceed those positions.

Of course, in terms of salary increases, et cetera, they go through a moderation process. So we are giving the Ministries a flexibility. For example, if the honourable Minister for Fisheries wants to get an expert in fisheries that may not be available in Fiji or can only get him or her for a short period of time, the flexibility is to source it from SEG 1.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Mr. Chairman, just further to my clarification for SEG 1, does that factor in the Job Evaluation and how many are affected, especially in the reduction?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Which Job Evaluation?

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- No, because of the reduction, Mr. Chairman, there are a number of lawyers who will also be reduced in terms of the establishment. Does that affect that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, they will not be, like I said, the existing cadre of lawyers will not be reduced. The cadre of lawyers still remain. In fact, if you look at the number of the Ministries, there still have some vacant positions which they will fill, so it caters for that also.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, in situations where the Attorney-General's Chambers hire expert consultants. Are they also factored in the similar SEG or where they are reflected in this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think the honourable Professor Prasad just asked that question. If you look at Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 5, you will see drafting of Laws (\$300,000) and Legal Experts Expenses (\$50,000), so that is there too.

If you look in Head 50 which we can discuss, there is also General Consultancy Fees but for the lawyers specifically, these are the two provisions.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Ratu Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7 - Legal Aspects of Climate Change (\$50,000), can the honourable Minister clarify this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, I thank you for that. This is a very, very important allocation, Mr. Chairman.

There are a number of legal issues that are currently outside the domain of mainstream climate change issues. For example, if we get climate change refugees from Kiribati, what are their legal rights and status? There is no international agreement regarding that. Do they fall under, for example, refugees' status?

If, for example, you have a northern or southernmost tip of an island in Fiji that goes under water, where do you measure your EEZ from? Can you measure your EEZ from an island that has already gone under water, or can you not? These are some of the legal issues that are pertaining, so we want to address that. We, of course, are engaging and talking to a number of partners regarding that. So, that is the allocation for that.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, similarly under Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7 – Education and Public Awareness Programme (\$10,000) as well as Freedom of Information, perhaps, just some clarity on that. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Now, on Education and Public Awareness, again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sometimes we do have things, like the copyright, WIPO, intellectual property, office training and awareness on general laws.

We have had, at times, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we have been drafting new laws, we also sometimes have our own consultations. So, honourable Tikoduadua is well aware of Level 5 in those days and we are now in Level 9 where we do call members of the public and get their input into it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Just a clarification on SEG 7, Mr. Chairman, on the Fiji Law Reform Commission which has reduced by half. Last year it was \$300,000 and now it is \$150,000. Just to provide the reason for that and whether that is sufficient.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is sufficient. We have had some discussions, in fact, I just had a discussion with one of the lawyers which some of you do know, who used to be an academic and is now in private practice. I think some of you would think about using his services. We are talking to him in respect of coming up with some specific area that we want him to look. So, it is sufficient at this point in time.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- What is the Freedom of Information (\$75,000) under SEG 7, Sir?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There is a specific law before Parliament that has not been made as Act as yet, and we need to ensure that it gets implemented. The honourable Leader of the Opposition would know that under the 1997 Constitution, there is provision there that said that you must have an Act or a law regarding freedom of information. We, of course, have that provision. In fact, a much indepth provision under the Constitution.

Essentially, what it means is that, if I apply for a taxi permit and it has been rejected, I should have the freedom to be able to apply to LTA and know how the decision was arrived at. So we obviously have to have various laws around that as to what documentation needs to be made available. Who can access that?

For example, if I apply for the taxi permit, honourable Suliano Matanitobua should not be able to go and find out the reason, it is only for me. So, those are the provisions around that, so we hope to have the law in place functioning and this will be the cost of the implementation of that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nawaikula, you want to move your motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. My motion is asking for an injection of \$100,000 into this Head, especially to assist in those work - World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and Fiji Intellectual Property. I am sorry that the honourable Attorney-General said that the amount that is stated there is enough, but I feel that we should prop this up and, therefore, the motion for an amount to be allocated there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a seconder?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I beg to second the motion, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have explained it sufficiently.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, basically because I feel it is a priority area. Traditional knowledge by the way is oral and if we have a delay in addressing this, we fear losing all the traditional knowledges that we have.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I share the enthusiasm on rare occasions with the honourable Nawaikula, however, all traditions, of course, there is intellectual property around them but you need to have laws to enforce them. Like I said, we do want to beef up this particular office in the awareness about it, but we do need the laws to be in place

Only once the laws are approved, then we can actually beef up, and we will need to have the funds to actually beef up this office for the implementation of those roles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to make one clarification. Earlier on, I talked about the freedom of information. The actual Act was passed by Parliament last year, some honourable Members may recall this. However, the implementation is yet to commence, so these funds will actually help us to commence and put in place the rules, which will mean that members of the public can actually start using this law.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I recognise that the motion by honourable Nawaikula is before the House but could I just seek your indulgence and make further clarification on other SEGs as well, apart from the motion that is before the Committee, particularly under SEG 9, honourable Chairman.

In SEG 9, there is an allocation of \$108,600 for the Upgrade of Door Management System and IT Equipment, I think this is not the hospital door.

(Laughter)

Previously, a budget had a \$400,000 allocation for the Upgrade and Refurbishment of Office. I wish they could transfer some of those to the Ministry of Health. Honourable Minister, is there a difference and could you provide some clarity?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you honourable Member, you do not want to use biometrics to enter the toilet in the hospital. This precisely what it is for. As you know, honourable Member, he was, at one point in stage, the Permanent Secretary for Justice.

I invite him to come and visit the Ministry of Justice because you will see a number of significant changes and upgrades that have taken place. We do have a lot of security issues for staff, et cetera. Now, you will find a lot of the offices where you have either biometrics in terms of entry into the offices, you have thumbprints, you have actual retina scans, so that what it is for, to ensure that our records et cetera are preserved, Official Receiver's Office and all those are areas that fall within the Ministry of Justice. But that is what it is for and the IT equipment is related to that.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification because there are some items appearing in the Office of the Prime Minister. Board and Committee expenses is on this.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have finished the Prime Minister's Office.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- No, it is the same as what is appearing on the other page but on Programme 1-1(5) – Board and Committee Expenses (\$20,000). Like I said, it appeared in the Prime Minister's Office as well, so can we have a clarification on that, please, on Board Expenses - SEG 5.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Member, with respect, we have been through this for the past two, three times. There are different offices or different heads, like for example, the Office of the Prime Minister has different boards that they are responsible for. The Attorney-General's Office has different boards. The Minister for Fisheries, et cetera, they may have their own different boards so this is to meet the expenses of those boards.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 3. That Head 3 be increased by \$100,000 in Programme 1-1(SEG 5) with respect to Fiji Intellectual Property Office (\$150,000). This is the motion by honourable Niko Nawaikula.

Those in favour say "Aye".

(Chorus of "Ayes")

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Those against say "Noe".

(Chorus of "Noes")

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The "Noes" have it.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, honourable Chair. Just seek clarification on Programme 2-1(6) – Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO) Management Board - \$87,500. I understand that office has been reviewed and they are winding down, maybe just a clarification on that. And SEG 7 - Air

Services Agreement with other countries particularly Tuvalu and Solomon Islands. I suppose, the status of that. *Vinaka*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, Mr. Chair, Sir, the second one was in respect of.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Sorry, SEG 7 - Air Services Agreement Meetings circulated to Solomon Islands and Tuvalu; Fiji Airways and Air Solomons.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The SEG 6 query which is PASO. The PASO Office is not based in Fiji. It is actually based in Vanuatu. Mr. Chair, Sir, by way of background information, we have actually engaged the ICAO. We had an expert from ICAO and we are proposing that PASO is no longer necessarily relevant and that there needs to be something that needs to be a lot more robust and we think Fiji is a good place to have it but it is a subscription fee that we have to pay as a member of PASO.

In respect of the Air Services Agreement Meetings, I mean these are meetings we have on a bilateral basis; not just for Solomon Islands. You can have it in any ASA country, they must have an engagement with ASA. That is what it is for.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Chair, SEG 6 and I think this goes also with SEG 7. The grant to Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF), do we get an annual report from this organisation, given that they get a grant and also on the Aircraft Accident Investigation – SEG 7. Will a report on that Cessna 172 crash, has it been made available which would be of interest to us in terms of creating the legislation to improve or to safeguard our community? Do we get any annual report from CAAF, given the grant they are getting and the reports on accidents, do we also get it in the House? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji does produce an annual grant. The report on Delaikoro, the aircraft that crashed recently in Vanua Levu, there was a lot of publicity around it. It was in the papers. We actually had to, unfortunately we met with the members of the family of the deceased. We had discussions with them. We had engaged the services of an aircraft accident expert from New Zealand. The report is actually available on the website and when we did release the report, it was in the newspaper. We actually issued a press statement and the press statement actually has the website where you can go now and get the actual report itself. It was made available to the public. I do not have the website address on me, but, I can just get it for you in the course of this evening, but, it is there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Programme 2-1(6) – Domestic Air Services Subsidy, the last one in that SEG. My question is about the Ono-i-Lau runway, what is the stage of work on that because I also asked that same question last year.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Domestic Air Services Subsidy, is not for runway maintenance. This is the money we actually pay, we ask people to bid to provide air services to unprofitable routes which is essentially all the outer islands apart from Labasa. So people bid for it and there are two companies that are currently providing services which is Fiji Link and Northern Air.

Now with the fact that the Rotuma Island Airstrip has been extended where an ATR72 can land and therefore Fiji Link can actually make a bit more money, we expect that the subsidy rate to go down. Because previously they could only fly six people and they actually had to carry the fuel there and come back. So the cost of running even though we gave them a subsidy was very exorbitant. Now because there will be a higher volume in economies and scale means we can reduce the subsidy going forward.

In respect of the actual airstrip upgrade, the upgrades are specifically done by AFL. We have asked them to do that. I can at another time, Honourable Member, through you Chairman get you the details on that. I do not have it here with me.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- That is similar to shipping manifests?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Honourable Chairman, on Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 5 – Consultancy (\$70,000). Is this a local company or consultancy from overseas, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 1, SEG 5.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It can be for local or foreigners depending on the need.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Just a clarification, Mr. Chair, Sir, on the grant for Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji which has reduced from \$1.5 million to \$700,000; why has there been a reduction on the grant given to CAAF?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Because CAAF does have some money of its own. And like everyone else, they have chipped in and they have got enough money. A lot of these organisations have a nice health kitty.

Sorry, Mr. Chairman, and also just to let you know that a certain percentage of the departure tax does go to CAAF to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on this Head. Parliament will now vote on Head No. 3.

The question is that the amount of Head No. 3 – Office of the Attorney-General be approved. Does any member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Ayes and "Noes")

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Open the vote, close the vote.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The result of the vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes : 26

Noes : 21
Not Voted : 4

The motion is therefore agreed to.

Head 3 agreed to.

Head 4 – Ministry of Economy

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members the floor is open. Programme 1, Activity 1.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just a clarification on Programme 1-1(1). I note that there is an allocation for overtime there which I have not seen in the Ministries that we have covered; Overtime on SEG 1. Can we just get a clarification on why overtime is being reflected in this particular SEG on Ministry of Economy on SEG 1?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. Because there is overtime that needs to be paid. There are certain people who are Established Staff below a particular pay rate, so they do get overtime paid for them from SEG 1. It is not the only Ministry as we go forward. You will see that there is some overtime. You will see generally overtime is reserved for SEG 2 where you have hourly paid people. But there are certain people who are permanent staff, because they get lower salary, they do get paid overtime.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just another clarification on Programme 1, Activity 1 – SEG 5. As we go into the individual details on the Annual Maintenance Fee - PABX System. There is a reduction in the overall budget allocation for SEG 5. I am just curious to know whether the fee is also reduced in terms of the annual maintenance of the PABX system.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, this reduction is due to the actual amount required for the payment of the fee to TFL. I sharpened it around so this is what is required. We are not reducing the fee as such. I mean, they should not have reduced the fee.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now look at this motion by the Honourable Aseri Radrodoro. To move that Head 4 be increased by \$15 million in Programme 1-1(SEG 6), with respect to FRCS Operating Grant.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It is supposed to be decreased. Can I amend it, please, Mr. Chairman, Sir? This is very important.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Write it down clearly so I can read it. Now the motion is that Head 4 be decreased by \$15 million in Programme 1-1-(6), with respect to FRCS Operating Grant.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- I beg to second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Could you speak to your motion.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I think the intentions of the motion was to reduce the allocation to Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority because basically due to the fact that we were promised when we enquired on this allocation last year about the increase from the previous years

was basically that we were assured that there were some staffing loopholes that needed to be addressed due to that increase that was made.

Also some issues on IT that need to be fixed up and we were assured that by August of last year (2018) this work will be completed. That was the motive and the need to reduce this allocation by \$15 million to keep check Government on the commitment that it has made to us. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Apologies, Mr. Chairman

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, maybe before the Honourable Minister, I wanted to contribute on this as well. Can I do that now?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you. I kind of have sympathy for the motion, Mr. Chairman, because as I said, FRCS is a very important institution in terms of revenue collection. The government already collected about an estimated billion dollars less in this financial year, from \$4.2 billion to \$3.2 billion. We want to collect \$3.4 billion in this financial year. It is very important that FRCS creates that confidence about itself but also it is helping the economy for the taxpayers and if they are not up to speed with providing reports, I was kind of recovering from my health scare then and I was told that we need to provide the declaration of assets. I actually went through quite a bit of stress trying to do that when the notice came out and I did that, I made sure that I complied with that.

I got my Accountant, spent a bit of time, got to the bank and then it was withdrawn, that is just one incident. There are a lot of stories that people are coming to us and telling us. I do not know how, some of them might take it with a pinch of salt, some seems very credible and FRCS, Mr. Chairman, must come out very very clean, transparent, open about what it does in tax refunds, VAT refunds, advanced taxes, these are very important issues and any point where there is an impression that this institution is not up to speed in not providing the services that businesses and taxpayers need, then they will not have the credibility in terms of the ability to collect. Taxpaying is not just going and auditing and putting out penalties for businesses and individuals, it is also about getting the taxpayers to willingly and in a friendly way, administratively in simple manner pay taxes. I am not sure whether this allocation itself or whether we need from the Parliament itself, to send a signal that this is what we want the institution to be. So I kind of have sympathy for the Honourable Member. I know he was very brief in explaining the rationale for the motion, but I suppose that is where he is coming from, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, in the Budget Address I had said that we are putting in place a committee to look at the business processes regarding FRCS. Because we are also equally concerned in instances where FRCS or their staff may not be very professional, if I could put it that way. The FRCS, as we know that legally, it is an independent body. As the Minister responsible for Finance and Economy, I cannot go and tell FRCS what to do.

They have their own Board and obviously for very good reasons because if I had access to FRCS, I would know how much all of you own. I do not know that and that is the way it should be, but we do agree that the processes of FRCS and we ourselves, of course, have received a number of complaints, where sometimes some of the officers have, from one perspective, abused their authority by not necessarily seeing taxpayers as their customers or their clients. I have been saying this for the past three

to four years to the CEO of FRCS that he must see all taxpayers as your customer, as your client. They are the goose that lays the golden egg.

I think the Members do not realise the kind of things that I do say to them, but the reality is that we are putting in place this committee. The reality is that, cutting their budget is not going to necessarily mean that we will fix things up. It is an attitudinal issue and I think that is also the service issue. You may have also heard in the Budget Announcement that I did say we are getting FRCS to have different officers servicing different client base.

If I am a FRCS officer, the way that I deal with the company that has the gross turnover of \$10 million, \$15 million or \$20 million should be completely different to the way that I will deal with someone who has got a gross turnover of \$200,000 or \$500,000, a small business person, or someone who is trying to make a bit of revenue because they got two or three flats. What we have said to them, “These people all need to be trained in their specific business areas”, that is one of the things that we are trying to do, to get FRCS to be focused from their perspective.

Getting back to the Budget itself, honourable Radrodro’s motion, he would see that we have actually cut their budget by \$13.5 million.

From what they are receiving this year, the allocation of \$68 million, we are cutting it down to \$55 million. And part of that, of course, is to do with the fact that some of the businesses automation processes and the IT Upgrade they were doing is now coming to an end, and they should be actually rolled out in the new financial year.

That would actually see a bit more reduction in costs in terms of operational cost for them. I have got the details here. For example, we have reduced the \$2.7 million from the Personal Emoluments because there are number of vacancies and in terms of some of the positions, they are overstaffed in certain areas. We have said, “We do not want to give you any more funding for that”, but we believe that there are certain areas where they need to actually get more people and get highly trained people.

We recently had a relationship with the Customs Office from New Zealand, where they provided training to the Customs people in FRCS.

There are a number of relationship that are being growing up. The Board had also recruited the services of one of the accounting firms from overseas to build in some audit capacities. So there are a number of issues there but I think cutting the budget further would not necessarily achieve the outcome. I think it is more of the attitudinal issue, getting the sense of professionalism within FRCS, and they should be listening to this.

Honourable Prasad raised that issue about that notice. We completely disagreed with that and when we actually did see the notice, I immediately called the Chairman and I said to him, “What is the meaning of this and unbeknown to the Board, the Management had actually issued that notice. We have said to the Chairman that they need to be a lot more active and those are the kind of transitional issues that are taking place, so I would recommend, Mr. Chairman, Sir, that we maintain that Budget and, of course, they need to work a lot more smarter. Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, while we are on this, if I could just add one or two points more for the interest of the honourable Minister for Economy that he could take on. I think there

are a number of issues, for example, interpretation of the laws by FRCS. I do not know but I have come across a lot of complaints from businesses and taxpayers about laws.

The reason being, court ruling, for example, in relation to a fine for a businessman was overturned by the court where the FRCS took the responsibility to do that. The Court said, “No, you cannot do that, you cannot enforce a law, the law will have to be enforced by the Court.

For example, there is a thing about produce suppliers and kava dealers are telling me that if you buy kava from the farmers for \$90 and sell it for \$100, you actually pay VAT on \$100, essentially if it is 9 percent VAT, you pay \$9 tax out of a \$10 profit. I actually urge the honourable Minister for Economy to look at these legal issues as well in the Committee that he is going to look at, the processes and how FRCS can deal with legal issues and the interpretation of the taxation laws that we pass here in this Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, I kind of feel compelled to respond to that. The development of taxation jurisprudence is very, very important.

The development of jurisprudence in the area of tax law can only take place if matters actually do get taken up to the court. I was recently reading a law report in Australia where various tax officers have taken the Australia Taxation Office (ATO) to court. Sometimes these matters do need to be vented through the court system. Obviously, the moment the court actually handed down its decision, there is now an emphatic ruling on it and therefore all parties have to adhere to it.

That needs to take place just because there is a particular legal dispute and things go to court does not mean everything is all bad. But I have to also say that there are people, there are companies that are actually obfuscating the law, that are not paying their taxes. The fact that we have this supermarket chain that was liable for \$54 million in unpaid taxes they should have paid over the past few years. They had to pay it and they did pay that. These people do need to pay their taxes. There are people who are actually circumventing the law. I can tell you numerous horror stories where people will try and bring goods into the country and putting at a different tariff code which has a reduced tariff rate but they are getting away with millions of dollars.

So that needs to take place, on the other end, of course, we have to deal with FRCS being a lot more professional and perhaps in some instances over-zealous but that zealotry is actually required in certain other areas. I mean we have had people who have been importing goods into Fiji actually smuggling things into Fiji. We cannot have that because everyone pays taxes and our argument has been, corporate tax is 20 percent, VAT is 9 percent, personal income taxes is very low - pay those taxes, make your profits, make money and invest in Fiji enjoy yourselves but just pay the right taxes, that is all we want.

I think there are two sides to a coin, it is not that it is not completely bad, there are sorts of stuff that they need to do, there are certain things that they need to kind of reign themselves in.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 4 that it be decreased by \$15 million in Programme 1-1(6) with respect to FRCS Operating Grant.

Votes cast:

Ayes : 22

Noes : 25
Not Voted : 4

The motion is defeated.

MR .CHAIRMAN.- Activity 2 - Treasury. Any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MR .CHAIRMAN.- Activity 3 - Budget and Planning.

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MR .CHAIRMAN.- Activity 4?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 1, Activity 4 - Internal Audit and Good Governance, SEG 5 – Annual Maintenance Fee – TeamMate.

There is a reduction in that allocation. Just confirmation from the honourable Minister regarding this annual maintenance fee on Page 29?

MR .CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, be on the ball. When we move from one thing to another, if you want to intervene say so, not when we have gone ahead. I am trying to keep up with you, but you try and keep up with me as well.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I am in to Activity 4 now, Sir. Programme 1, Activity 4, SEG 5 - Annual Maintenance Fee - TeamMate.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Annual Maintenance fee for TeamMate in fact has been increased (\$75,000).

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Alright.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There is a reduction in training. So, you have to add that entire SEG.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So TeamMate actually has gone up by \$14,344 and there has been a reduction in training.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.-Any particular reason why it has gone up?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes. To fund the withholding charges for the TeamMate annual fees.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- And that is paid overseas or local?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Overseas, that is why we are withholding.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Right we will move on. Activity 5.

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Clarification on Activity 5, SEG 4 – eTender Portal Maintenance. Who manages that? Is it a company that looks after it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, it is a New Zealand company actually.

Sorry, no, I can confirm it is not you. It is a New Zealand Company, just in case you thought it was you, it is not you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I want to have a look at that again.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chair, on Maintenance Cost for 20 VIP vehicles (\$20,000), can we just get a clarification on this, what sort of VIP vehicles are these?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sure, these are the Chinese vehicles - 20 that were donated to us back in 2014 which we do use from time to time for VIPs that come and visit us.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 6?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 7?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A clarification on the Project Staff – Programme 1, Activity 7?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is to meet the salaries and operational expenses for the engagement of 10 NEC officers for verification of 80,423 invoices for the various programmes that has been implemented through CIU and the idea is to complete all of that and it also includes, for example, the Home Care, the invoices, so we are verifying all of that, so we have recruited 10 NEC officers to complete this process for us, for verification purposes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- On the same Activity, on Purchase of User Licence Capital Project Database. Is this a software, where is it from - overseas or local, can we just get a clarification on this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sure, we are now capturing all our capital projects on this particular database, it is something you can buy off the shelf and you use this software in relation to the Construction-related Capital Projects. For example, it looks at that work flow, from the work flow to the project initiation, to project commissioning and later on, archiving records for future reference. So one of the things that we have also done is we want to start putting into a software base for future reference, things like government quarters, office space and various other grants that we do give to schools.

We also now and again, I have been invited the Members of the Opposition for a number of times and I do not know why they do not want to come. The CIU has an Ops Room in respect of the major

construction we have done. You can actually see the work flow, see where the schools are built, what stage there are at, there is a Gambian chart there, and you can look at that now.

All the schools now that have been completed, we actually have a software that has captured the architectural plans, the design plans, the materials that have been used is now stored. So God forbid, the next time if, for example, there is a fire of this Category 5 or 6 cyclones and something does get damaged, we know exactly what has been used in the building, why are the engineering specifications, what are the architectural plans because as you have said before, over 95 percent of all the schools that we rebuilt did not have architectural plans or engineering certification or indeed Engineers plans.

Now, they all have it and now they will all be stored, so that is part and parcel of that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The software.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chair, on Item 4, there is the Maintenance of Boron House on SEG 4, can you just clarify why Boron House is here?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Because the Construction Implementation Unit looks after major assets, like government quarters, et cetera.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chair, on SEG 1, there is a reduction in allocation, does this mean there will be a reduction in the number of staff?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, because of the number of vacancies that have not been filled and probably will not get filled. So that is why.

Just also for the Member's information too, we have also factored in, for example, when you advertise a position, the advertisement goes on 1st August, and you may have four to six weeks when the advertisement is open. Then the advertisement is closed, then you have the shortlisting, then you have interviews and sometimes depending the position or positions, you may actually have three months into the financial year already. So this is what we have done. We do not make a salary allocation for that position for the entire year because they will not actually be there for the entire year because they will come into the year at the end of the first quarter. So we have the salary for the three-quarter of the year and then the next year, there will be allocated a full salary. So that is how we have sharpened it. That is why you will see some of those expenditure changes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Alright. We move onto Activity 8.

(Chorus of "Ayes" and "Noes")

There is an amendment to Activity 8. You have the floor, honourable Qereqeretabua.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Chair. Mr. Chair, I note that the \$200,000 allocation for CommonSensing under SEG 7 which is part of the partnership with the British Government who is contributing aid-in-kind to the value of around \$3.7 million. This project is all about geographic information systems and remote sensing and we know that the Ministry of Economy does not possess this kind of technical expertise. How many staff from the Ministry of Lands which does have

the expertise would be absorbed by the Ministry of Economy? So my motion is to have that sum left out of Head 4.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a seconder?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chair, I second the motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What reducing it? You want to move it somewhere or leave it there? Where?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- To move it to the Ministry of Lands. I think that is where it belongs. One of my colleagues will later move to absorb back into Head 33 - Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources because we believe that is where this actually belongs.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, Sir, if I can enlighten the honourable Member. As announced in the Budget, many of these projects are what we call “inter-ministerial projects.” Obviously the donors want to work with what we call the “Head agency”. This is to do with climate change. This is why it is within Climate Change. As highlighted in the Budget and also, the honourable Minister had also said, they have the expertise in certain aspects of it. Certain aspects of climate change rests within the Division of Climate Change, so you cannot take dichotomous approach to it. It is an inter-ministerial project.

This \$200,000 is for the procurement of IT equipment and the setting up of the project management unit within this particular division because they are attending to the technical aspects. That information then comes in to this particular division and then they project manage it because it affects other ministries too. So there needs to be a centralised repository to keep this information. The technical aspects of course, is done by the Ministry of Lands. There are certain aspects of this information that will gain that Climate Change Division will, for example, contact the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, will contact the Ministry of Environment, Provincial Development. This is why you have climate change within the Ministry of Economy because planning comes there too. So it is a repository that deals with the different agencies. This is how you mainstream climate change.

The climate change expertise does not rest with the Ministry of Lands. The technical expertise regarding geospatial tracking, et cetera is with the Ministry of Lands. But there are other agencies that deal with it, so I hope that you understand why this is there because it is a central repository. The technical people are doing their stuff and we are simply pulling it together and then farming it out to the different ministries that will actually use this information. Obviously the British Government that is funding it is quite happy for this to be done in this particular manner.

We have signed the agreement, the agreement is with the Ministry of Economy through the Climate Change division, because when they go to their taxpayers too, they are not going to say that we have given this money in relation to climate change to the Ministry of Lands in Fiji. They will say, “We have done this through the Climate Change Division in the Ministry of Economy that is then getting all the different technical and legal aspects.” That is how you deal with it.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, would it be better off just to leave the staff from the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources where they belong?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We are not taking staff from them.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I believe they have already been absorbed by the Ministry.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No! His staff is with him, they have not been absorbed.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Maybe, we could hear from the honourable Minister for Lands.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- As the Minister for Economy had explained, the technical expertise remains with us. The workforce and equipment remains with us, but the financing part is with the Ministry of Economy because there are other Ministries that will come out from that, that finance.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Qereqeretabua, you have to understand that Ministries do not work in silos. So just because you may have two of the honourable Minister of Lands staff, coming and, for example, doing a two-week attachment with the Climate Change Division does not suddenly make them Climate Change Division staff. Just because you may have two Climate Change Division staff doing a two week understanding of the Minister for Lands' Ministry does not make them Ministry of Lands' staff. That is what we call inter-ministerial co-operation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you happy or do you want to withdraw this?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I do not want to withdraw.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will vote on this.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Despite, the common sense.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote that \$200,000 be left out of Head 4 in respect of Programme 1, Activity 8, SEG 7.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 21 |
| Noes | : | 26 |
| Not Voted | : | 4 |

The motion is defeated.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Head 4, Programme 1, Activity 1.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A clarification, Sir, on SEG 7 – Household Income and Expenditure Survey (\$1,013,785). There is a decrease in that allocation, so what is the reason for that decrease?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is because the first phase of the Survey has been completed.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Programme 3-1, honourable Tuisawau.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Programme 3-1(7) - Consultancy Fees (\$1,461,448), I seek a clarification on that. Also for SEG 10 on Grants - Fiji Rice Limited (\$800,000), Food Processors, Copra

Millers, especially the first two which is Fiji Rice Limited and Food Processors. Is this purchases of capital items?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, this supports the restructure or divestment of public enterprise, like Energy Fiji Limited, Food Processors Fiji Limited, so we do hire. For example, with Energy Fiji Limited, we do have to hire people who do the evaluation of the company, external consultants, we do have people who do the advertisement for us because we need it at arm's length. So this is what the fees are for. Sorry your second question was?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Food Processors and Fiji Rice – SEG 10.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In respect of Food Processors, this is the same grant. It is for improving the Company's processing plants with infrastructure upgrades and purchasing of processing equipment. It will also subsidise procurement of agricultural products for the year 2019. They do buy produce, it does also help them and also some of the accounting services requirements, and they are fixing up their reports.

In respect of Fiji Rice Limited, the Capital Grant of \$800,000 is for the purchase of rice paddy from farmers. We actually give money to the Company to purchase rice paddy from the farmers.

There is a reduction of \$450,000, compared to the previous year because in the last year, we helped to complete a major capital upgrade to the Dreketi Mill, which was funded by the Government. It was a major upgrade and those of you who have been there will see the major upgrade to the Rice Mill in Dreketi. So that is what it is for.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will now vote on Head 4 – Ministry of Economy.

The question is that the amount of Head 4 – Ministry of Economy, be approved.

Does anyone oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Ayes" and "Noes")

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 26 |
| Noes | : | 21 |
| Not Voted | : | 4 |

The motion is agreed to.

Head 4 agreed to.

Head 5 – Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we might be rushing a bit too much. I am just going to ask the honourable Minister to clarify. Mr. Chairman, we have not seen a lot

of the Annual Reports being tabled in Parliament. What is happening with this Ministry? We want to know. We are going to approve the Budget, we are going to approve the allocations. What is the happening to the Annual Reports from this Ministry?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, the honourable Member would also know that we had the Auditor-General's Report that does come out. You will find that in some of the Ministries, the Auditor-General's Report actually precedes their Annual Reports themselves. That is not as if there is no accountability.

The Annual Reports, apart from the accounts itself, also has the functions, the outputs, et cetera, of those respective Ministries. But as far as the actual audit of the accounts are concerned, the Auditor-General's Report is very much up to speed with this.

And as I said in some of the other earlier Ministries, those that are behind we are making sure that they do and the Ministers over here take cognizance of that fact, together with the Permanent Secretaries, to make sure to get all their Annual Reports up to date.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, if I can just add; I do not want to labour this point too much but I think that is fine, we get the Auditor-General to look at it. But I think it is important that Parliament must receive Annual Reports from Ministries because we have a process where Annual Reports are then referred to the Committee and then the Committee does its work and brings the report back to Parliament. Those who are responsible in the Ministries must ensure that they are accountable to Parliament and if they cannot produce Annual Reports, then we need to seriously think about what is happening in those Ministries.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 7 – Village By Laws, are you introducing the Bill back to Parliament?

HON. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No. There were some works from consultations that were carried out that need to be completed. Also, this is more to do with the awareness that needs to be done regarding existing regulations, et cetera. These are existing ones, not new ones, through the Turaga-ni-Koro et cetera.

Bylaws do not actually come to Parliament, they are regulations, so regulations do not come to Parliament.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Mr. Chairman, this is on the Turaga-ni-koro allowance and Mata-ni-Tikina allowance which is on SEG 6; can the honourable Minister explain what that is about? Is it an increase in those two allowances?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There has been no change to the previous year, so we have maintained the same levels. So, the Turaga-ni-koros get paid \$100 for the 1,171 villages in the 14 provinces and then you have the Mata ni OTikina, they are also paid an allowance.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Because that is causing some concerns in the villages because the Nasi-ni-koro is getting more than the Turaga-ni-koro and the Turaga-ni-koro does a bit more work, I think.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We take note of that, honourable Member.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Yes, thank you.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to move a motion to increase the allowance for the Turaga-ni-koro from the current \$100 a month that they are receiving. I actually raised this yesterday in my response, if Government can consider equalising that with the Nasi-ni-Koro allowance, who are receiving \$200.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a seconder?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I second the motion, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can you speak on your motion?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, I had raised yesterday the need to consider equalising the allowance being paid to the Turaga-ni-Koro currently at \$100 with the allowance that is being paid to the community health workers, Nasi-ni-koro, who are currently receiving \$200. They are both doing good work for the village but in my view the *Turaga ni Koro* have lot more responsibilities in terms of the internal work in the village maintaining community work, cleanliness and only nurse in the village apart from the servicing of all Government visitations and NGOs. It is almost a 24/7 work. Thank you, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to support the motion. You are talking about people who are virtually on duty 24/7 and the calling is not limited to any area of activity in the village. It is quite all encompassing on the life and the administration of village life. In the absence of proper laws that are mostly traditional, it is quite a task to expect them to carry out the roles that we entrust on them. I think they should be paid the same level as the village nurse or even more, given the scale of what we expect of them. Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman, in support of that motion, I agree that the *Turaga ni Koro* does a lot more work than the *Nasi ni Koro*. The *Nasi ni Koro* is very good too. However, the *Turaga ni Koro* meets all the visitors who come to the village at whatever time they come, particularly from Government and also from any other groups that come to the village, they see the *Turaga ni Koro* first. He is unable to do other work besides looking after the responsibilities of the village including attending the Village Council Meeting. So I would agree that they really need an increase in their allowance equal to the *Nasi ni Koro* or more because they have more responsibilities. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Chairman, may I through you, just clarify on the workings around the village health worker. The village health workers expectations continue to increase, probably, I would suggest, maybe another 45 percent of the expectations that we expect of them. Really the work that they have been doing is more like a caring type model, more like a triaging type model, but our Nursing Division have been working on what are their expectations. They would be involved, not only in terms of a caring type model but also promoting health in the village, looking at water sanitation, promoting public health, advocating for health and also being the link for all facets of health. So being the link for the doctors, nurses, public health and protection officers, and this is becoming more and more comprehensive.

In yesterday's Budget speech by the Assistant Minister for Health, he talked about some of the ideas we are thinking about in terms of their clinic and how we are going to communicate with them. I just want us to be weary that the current work that you may see in some of the village health workers is

not representative of the new model that we are expecting of them. What we are going to be expecting of them is actually a lot more. So I just want that to be made known as we have discussions around this because it is not the old model village health worker that we will see. It is going to be a very comprehensive arm of the Ministry of Health that is available right at the community level.

If you look around the world, this is being shown to be very important as we advance towards universal health coverage, which I discussed today; the work of the community health worker, the work of the village health worker. There are countries which have manuals for the village health worker. Some of the great work around the community health worker is coming out of Brazil and those are some of the models we are looking at. So the days where the village health worker was at home, people would go over have a look at them, see them and they would direct them to go and see the nurse or the health centre is now gone. The expectations have increased, there have been some areas and some provinces where we have done training. Bua is one of them that they have done extensive training with the village health workers. Some mothers that I cannot name at this time, but as I said, please do not think that the old model of the village health worker is what we are comparing that to the *Turaga ni Koro* because once the model comes into play, it will be a lot, lot more. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I just want to contribute to the motion before the Committee which regards to the functions of the *Turaga ni Koro* and the *Nasi ni Koro*. I respect what the honourable Minister is saying in terms of the uniqueness of the functions of the health worker. But I think this needs to be taken within the context of how the community actually does work as you would understand.

In terms of where the *Turaga ni Koro* is within the community and the functions of the health worker. I think the solution to this would not be to reduce whatever the health worker is getting right now but to review what the *Turaga ni Koro* really should be getting because the analogy that I can sort of bring before the Committee today is, it will be the Minister for Health getting more than the honourable Prime Minister by way your salary in terms of responsibility and overall functions within the village itself. My suggestion to the Committee would be, recognise the uniqueness of the work of the health worker but definitely there are more responsibilities on the part of the *Turaga ni Koro*. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- All right.

The motion is that Head 5 be increased by \$1.452 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 with respect to the *Turaga Ni Koro* allowance.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now vote on that amendment.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 21 |
| Noes | : | 26 |
| Not voted | : | 4 |

The motion is defeated.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Hold it. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, you have a motion.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- To talk on the motion, Sir?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Move your motion.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You forgot?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- No. That is Village Bylaws?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I move that it be reduced by \$45,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a seconder?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chairman, I beg to second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Could you speak to your motion?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The reason for totally removing this \$45,000 given that Government in January last year had announced that this particular activity was suspended before the Elections. Our Village By-Law, the consultation whether it is on draft Bylaw or whether they are working on the current By-Law, there is the belief on grassroot level that these By-Laws will not come up again. But it has come up again in the Estimates after Elections and that is why I move that it will be totally removed from the Estimates. Given that there is nothing wrong with the current by-law and everyone is following it and has kept the village intact.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, if I may clarify. As highlighted that this is nothing to do with any new bylaws. There are existing by-laws as the honourable Members has highlighted and given the different views last year, essentially just to reinforce that the existing ones are in place. That is what the funding is for. If you look at the actual allocation itself, we have reduced it by \$5,000. It has gone down to \$45,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 5. The decrease by \$45,000 in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7 with respect to village by-laws.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 21 |
| Noes | : | 26 |
| Not Voted | : | 4 |

The motion is defeated.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, Activity 2.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I am sorry, Mr. Chair, I had a point of clarification under SEG 7 of the same activity, please.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, we have moved.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, under SEG 7 last year, Mr. Chair the budget still under Programme 1-1(7).

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, we have finished.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chair, I had spoken before you handed the time over for voting.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, we have done the vote on that and we moved on Activity 2.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Activity 2, SEG 10 on the Demarcation of Village Boundaries. When will this activity be completed given it is an ongoing allocation in the past budgets.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a seconder?

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, when will this be completed?. Which one - the Demarcation of the Un-surveyed Lands or Demarcation of Village Boundaries?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- On Village Boundaries.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Member if you look at it you will see that there has been a reduction in the budget by \$63,000 compared to last year, essentially is to align it with the expenditure trend. The objectives should digitally map out villages with the use of real time like the hand held GPS accuracy. Of course this does minimise in particular where you have village boundaries that are very close by together; it minimises disputes and conflicts. Again it facilitates *ad hoc* requests for the formalisation with iTaukei villagers designated for relocation and facilitate the implementation of these particular relocations.

It is an ongoing project, for example, I will have to tell you like the removal of Vunidogoloa to higher ground. We now have to demarcate that. We have 43 coastal villages and areas that we have to relocate people to. So, we cannot say there is an end time *per se*. Once we move those people, we will have to have some allocations for them to make sure that the boundaries are well mapped out and surveyed, et cetera. But the expenditure is actually been reduced by \$63,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, Mr. Chair, I move the allocation on Programme 1 Activity 2 SEG 10, on the three items; Demarcation of Unsurveyed Lands (\$216,212), Survey of Unsurveyed Lands (\$176,157) and Demarcation of Village Boundaries (\$107,631). When you add all those up, it is \$500,000. I am proposing an additional \$500,000 for the actual survey of those areas, there is a need to do that quickly and complete and be done with it.

HON. RATU T.N. NAVURELEVU.- I beg to second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You speak to your motion.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- I think the motion is to increase the allocation. They need to do it quickly and complete with it quickly and settle up the lot of disputes particularly when they would not demarcate all the boundaries, and not surveying all those lands that are not surveyed. It is important to do them quickly and be done with it. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 5 – to be increased by \$500,000 in Programme 1, Activity 2, SEG 10 with respect to Demarcation of Surveyed Lands, Survey of Unsurveyed Lands, Demarcation of Village Boundaries. We will now vote.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 17 |
| Noes | : | 28 |
| Not Voted | : | 5 |

The motion is defeated.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 3?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- On Activity 2, if you do not mind, please, before we go.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have already done that.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- This one is not quite SEG 7, Sir, we voted on SEG 10 and the other one, but I was waiting for a chance to raise an issue on SEG 7.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 3, SEG 7.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- On Activity 2, Sir, sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are on Activity 3 now.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, Activity 3, Sir. Thank you, Honourable Chair.

Mr. Chair, under SEG 7, there is an allocation of 33.4K for Cultural Mapping Verifications. All there is 250K allocation for cultural mapping programme, both activities are related. When the Opposition queried this during the last budget debate, the honourable Minister for Economy said, and I quote “We have already collected for example, Lomaiviti Province, between 2000 and 2009 ...

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Order! Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- ... and they need obviously need to verify. This year the information collated from the following districts of Lomaiviti Province will be verified which covers about 70 villages all the way from Levuka, Lovoni, Bureta, Moturiki, Mudu, Cawa and Batiki. They go

from village to village essentially and do the Cultural Mapping Programme and they obviously have to verify it because sometimes people have objections claiming, “This is mine or it belongs to someone else.”

Now it is a fairly drawn-out process and it is a slow process but nonetheless, it has to be done and I am glad I also have been part of the process like this too. The records obviously are kept with this particular group that does go out and do it. It would be amiss of us to publish it publicly when the verification processes have not been completed. Mr. Chair, again, this reiterates the point of the lack of annual reports so that we are at least given a systematic update of the progress of the Ministry, especially in relation to this activity so can the Minister, please, now give us an update on where this is at right now. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sure, Mr. Chair, Sir, in the current financial year, 80 out of the 110 villages have been verified. The remaining 30 to be verified in the next financial year, this is the verification process. So 80 out of the 110 villages have been verified and the remaining 30 to be verified in this 2019/2020 budget year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. We now vote on the Head. Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 5.

The question is that the amount of Head 5 – Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, be approved.

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

The Parliament will now vote.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 26 |
| Noes | : | 21 |
| Not Voted | : | 4 |

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion is therefore agreed to.

Head 5 agreed to.

Head 6 – Ministry of Defence and National Security

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for comments. Any comments on...

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chair, Sir, ...

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Hold it! I have not announced it yet. Programme 1, Policy and Administration, Activity 1. You have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chair, Sir, on SEG 7: National Security and Defence - Secretariat expenses. Is this the same as the allocation last year on the National Security and Defence Review and this is the expenses of the Secretariat, given it has reduced this year? Is this the group that is doing the White Paper?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chair, yes.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- So the allocation of \$900,000 is the completion of the whole task.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me also mention here that we in the Ministry, are undergoing a review and reform process as well and this is why it has been decided in the Budget consultation that they remain as project for this current financial year and completing the work because as I have stated in this honourable House as well. They have most of the drafts in place, including the National Security Strategy, Policy Framework, the Police White Paper, because when we did the initial reform under the Ministry for Civil Service and the Civil Service Reform Unit (CSRU), the Ministry of Defence was not in that list of priority ministries.

May I say, honourable Chair, Sir, that since I got in in December last year, I have started the process and this is why we still have them as “Project Team” but we are looking at it as regularised in the Defence Ministry for the future but that will be subject to the review and the reform process together with the CSRU and my new Permanent Secretary is working on this.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Chairman. I just want to ask two questions of the honourable Minister under SEG 5.

Honourable Minister, there is \$9,300 for Critical Infrastructure and Security Expenses so maybe a short explanation on that in terms of what it entails. Just looking at SEG 5 as well, for Air Sea and Land Surveillance (\$5,000). It looks a little bit cheap to me like cheap expenditure.

Considering Air Sea and Land Surveillance, so where is lack of information can we just get some indication in terms of what that is looking at, the mode of Surveillance? Is it for online or something like that? Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, on the allocation for Critical Infrastructure and Security Expenses, at the Ministry we also monitor the Critical Infrastructure of Government and that may include Water Authority, Energy Fiji, Fuel Depots, Gold Mine, the Dam in Monasavu and so forth.

Every now and then we do site visits and then we coordinate with the agencies on the ground so that is that allocation. For Air Sea and Land Surveillance, as we are responsible for search and rescue within the region, the naval personnel will need to be taken as well for travel and accommodation expenses, assisting in the Surveillance, particularly of our EEZ and our areas of responsibility, and that is why we have that allocation.

As you know through the New Zealand, Australia and the French, they also have that. So when they come in, our people get on board, the same with the naval vessels as well. When they come, our people get on board for the Surveillance, both the aircraft and for naval vessels as well.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I recognise the explanation honourable Chairman, but it is just that I am not sure whether \$5,000 is actually adequate for the 12 months, that is just my question, whether it is adequate, sounds a little bit small in my view.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Well, it is sufficient, because it is usually one or two at the most. And most of these when we get on board the vessels or the other expenses are by the host parties. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In fact, Mr. Chairman, there is no change from the previous year. It is still the same amount so it has been adequate, the trend of expenditure is adequate.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, I have a couple more questions under the same SEG. The allocation for our Security Industry Board (\$15,000), but, last year it received \$20,000, when will the Minister table the Annual Report for this?

Also, still under SEG 5 is an allocation for \$40,000 for Narcotics Policy Framework, and I guess this is a spelling error, I am supposed to say, 'Narcotics Policy Framework', is this a new activity because it was not there last year, and how do you plan to roll that out? Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Chairman. On the Security Industry Board, honourable Chairman, Sir, this is administered by the Ministry.

This allocation is for the administration of the secretariat together with the allowances for the Security Industry Board Meetings. The Board Members have been approved and gazetted, and we will reconvene shortly and the functions of the Board, they do the verification and the issuance of the Master licence fees and the registration and processing.

The Security Industry is quite a big component of our employment sector, but unfortunately it is something that has been neglected over the years, and through the Security Industry Act and, of course, the Board supervises together with the Ministry, we are looking at tightening up on this particular area, because they play a very critical role as well in linking up with the other security stakeholders.

The decrease in the budget is just purely based on the low utilisation, simply because the Board was not appointed. I have to re-appoint the Board after there were a few errors because one or two of the names that were recommended to me, I found out later that they do not hold a Master Licence which is a requirement under the Act. For them to serve in the Board, they have to have a Master Licence, so there was no utilisation because of the low number of meetings. But we will monitor that for the year, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

On the Narcotics Policy Framework, this is a new activity all together, a new inclusion for 2019-2020 Budget. This is to cater for the consultations that we need to do in the Divisions and, of course, we have a draft National Narcotic Policy Document and, of course, the printing work, et cetera. The travel to the Western and the Central Divisions and also roadshows. This is a new activity and thus the allocation of \$40,000, Mr. Chairman. Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Members we will now vote on Head 6.

The Question is that the amount of Head 6 – Ministry of Defence and National Security be approved.

Votes cast:

Ayes : 25

Noes : 18
Not Voted : 8

The motion is agreed to.

Head 6 agreed to.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, can I make a suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I can see that you and I both feel tired. I was going to suggest that it seems we are rushing. I think we have time tomorrow, for the whole day, so maybe we can continue tomorrow?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am just looking around to see.

(Laughter)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- May I suggest, therefore, honourable Chairman, Sir, that we just do another one on Head 7, and then retire and resume tomorrow morning.

Head 7 – Ministry Of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is open. Head 7-1-1. Honourable Teimumu Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, SEG 5 - Apprentice Scheme - Other Industry (\$200,000). Can the honourable Minister explain what this is about? Is it new?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation for this is we pay to the students who go to FNU for apprentice. That is the allocation here and for higher secondary.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- How are these apprentices chosen? Where do they come from?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Government, yes.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- What industries? From schools, technical colleges, where do these apprentices come from?

HON. P.K. BALA.- FNU. I have said, you are not listening.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- The Apprentice Scheme, the Apprentices who come to the Scheme...

HON. P.K. BALA.- From the industries, I am sorry about that.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Do they come from any of the Technical Colleges?

HON. P.K. BALA.- No.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Montfort Boys Town?

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, from the industries and Government Ministries as well, and also shipping, Mr. Chairman.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, it is a very important Scheme, apprenticeship and we see the number of people with trade skills reducing. In the labour market, it is hard to find them. So, this \$200,000, I have not put in a slip but I am urging the Government to relook at this for the next few years and increase so that we have more skilled tradesmen for Fiji and not for export, which the honourable Minister is targeting.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, can I say this, the amount that has been allocated here is based on the previous years and let me make it very clear again that this Scheme is all under industries. So, increasing makes no difference because this is what we are going to use. It is for Government apprenticeship.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Member has raised an important issue. I think the point he was making is that, apprenticeship scheme invariably in most countries is the best way to train technical people. So, I think what the honourable Member was suggesting and I think Government should take this seriously on board because otherwise, we will not have skills here. We already have shortage because we do not have a very well planned apprenticeship scheme.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, we are not denying that. What I am saying is that the allocation here is based on previous years.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 2?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, a clarification on Programme 1-1(1), I think this is one of the Ministry's that we have covered. I am just trying to ask the question before....

HON. P.K. BALA.- Wait, wait, I cannot here.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are on Activity 2 now.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, a clarification, please. Can the honourable Minister advise under Programme 1-2(1) why are the Personal Emoluments and Wages Earners have been reduced?

The Personal Emoluments under Activity 6(1) why are they being reduced? What are the implications for the level of service around Fiji and our Divisional Labour Officers or reduction in the staffing in the Labour Services Division?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, there has been some realignment within the Ministry. So, the staff from this Activity has moved to Activity 1. So, you will see there is an increase in Activity 1.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes, that is exactly what it is, 25 staff have gone there. The staff have moved so the allocation has moved to Activity 1.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 3?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, on Activity 3(1) - Personal Emoluments, I see there is a reduction in terms of the Established Staff on OHS. Can we have some clarification from the honourable Minister?

On Established Staff, we have about \$2.8 million in 2018-2019 and we have \$2.3 million in this year's Budget. Why the reduction?

HON. P.K. BALA.- As I have said earlier on, there has been some movement of staff from certain Divisions. So in this Activity, we have moved seven staff, that is, from Activity 3 to other Departments.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Still on Programme 1-3(7) - Workmen's Compensation (\$1,000,000), we have a reduction there in terms of \$1 million from \$175 million. Can we have an explanation from the honourable Minister?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation is for the pending cases. As we all are aware, time and again, it has been mentioned in this honourable House that now the Accident Compensation Commission will deal with all the cases. So the allocation that is here, is only for the pending cases. Thank you.

HON. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 4. Honourable Professor Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the Standing Committee on Public Accounts actually made the recommendation to review the whole setup. There were a number of recommendations, the function of the National Employment Centre (NEC), lack of staff and the mandate. And I thought they were very good recommendations.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, that is why you see the movement of the staff within the Ministry?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am saying these allocations, is the review completed or are you still planning to do the review?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Review for what?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Based on what the Standing Committee on Public Accounts said. In fact, they made a number of recommendations.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What are those recommendations?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- For example, the management of NEC. The function of NEC has become too broad which has led to duplication of similar functions, it talks about lack of staff, NEC cannot make decisions for employers, and we have the right to employ. NEC should streamline its core functions....

HON. P.K. BALA.- Where are you reading from all the recommendations?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, I am reading from the Public Accounts Committee's recommendations, I do not think you read it.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, as I had mentioned and there is difference in allocation, that is the result of restructure of the Ministry.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is what I am asking whether you have done the review or not.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are not asking in a right manner.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No. Mr. Chairman, first he asked what are the recommendations. Obviously, he does not know that the Public Accounts Committee has made recommendations.

HON. P.K. BALA.- If I do not know, then how am I answering you?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not get upset.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, I am very easy today.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- These are legitimate questions, you have to answer them. I mean, if you have the allocation here and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has made these specific recommendations about the whole setup, you need to answer that properly for the people of this country.

HON. P.K. BALA.-Mr. Chairman, just to respond to Honourable Professor Prasad, the work is in progress. But as I had mentioned earlier, the restructure is taking place within the Ministry.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I can say that I am not satisfied with the answer, but I will leave it there.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You will never be satisfied.

(Laughter)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1-4(7) - Foreign Employment Services and Attachment Allowance. What are these? Can we have some explanation from the honourable Minister because there is quite a reduction in that allocation?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This Foreign Employment Service activity is the engagement of work attachees, specifically for those who have graduated with Certificate, Diploma and Degree to gain work experience. This is also in line with the recommendations that was made that honourable Professor Prasad was talking about, so attachment allowance, Mr. Chairman, this is in regards to the allowance that we pay to the Graduates. We pay \$120 weekly to those who have qualified with Diploma and Degree and \$100 for those who have are Certificate holders.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 5?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 6?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 7. The question is that the amount of Head 7 – Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations be approved.

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

Votes cast:

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Ayes | : | 26 |
| Noes | : | 19 |
| Not Voted | : | 6 |

The motion therefore is agreed to.

Head 7 agreed to.

Honourable Members, we have now concluded voting on Heads 1 to 7. We will now adjourn the Committee of Supply until tomorrow. Honourable Members, we will then go through the motions that I will return to my chair and then we will adjourn. Thank you, honourable Members.

The House resumed:

HON. SPEAKER.- I know you are keen to go home, honourable Sanjay Kirpal, but we have to go through the adjournment proper and I do not blame you.

(Laughter)

Honourable Members, thank you for your co-operation. We are adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. *Vinaka*.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.33 p.m.