

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 17TH JUNE, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 17TH JUNE, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.37 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.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 7th June, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable 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 Friday, 7th June, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Acknowledgement – Dayspring Christian College

Honourable Members, I also take this opportunity to welcome the teachers and students of Dayspring Christian College of Namadi joining us in the gallery. You are most welcome to Parliament and I trust that your visit is educational, enjoyable and rewarding.

Non-Resident Ambassador of Switzerland

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I also welcome the Non-Resident Ambassador of Switzerland to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. David Vogelsanger. Thank you for taking time to visit our Parliament and you are most welcome.

Budget Process

Honourable Members, as I had informed Honourable Members at the Budget Announcement, the Budget process is an integral and fundamental part of the parliamentary process and I hope that you are all well prepared, I do not have any doubt that you are, for the late night sittings ahead of us this week. Thank you, Honourable Members.

Suspension of Standing Orders

Honourable Members, before we proceed to the next item on the Order Paper, I will allow the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

For the information of all Honourable Members, as is convention, the Leader of the Government in Parliament will move a procedural suspension motion pursuant to Standing Order 6(2), and I am allowing this without notice as I consider it necessary for the proper conduct of the business of Parliament.

I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Orders 23, 34 and 46 be suspended to allow the following during the sitting period beginning today, Monday, 17th June, 2019 and ending Friday, 21st June, 2019 -

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

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion. You have the floor.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the motion is purely procedural and has been agreed to in principle by the Business Committee and it is necessary to enable us to complete the business before the House for the entire week. I, therefore, commend this motion to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Does any Honourable Member wish to contribute to this motion?

As no Honourable Member wishes to contribute, I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I have nothing further to add.

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

The Question is:

That so much of Standing Orders 23, 34 and 46 be suspended to allow the following during the sitting period beginning today, Monday, 17th June, 2019 and ending Friday, 21st June, 2019 -

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members I have been advised that there are no Bills for consideration today.

DEBATE ON THE 2019-2020 APPROPRIATION BILL 2019

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to move the Second Reading of the 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill 2019, Bill No. 7 of 2019. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, I move that:

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. 7/2019), be now read a second time.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, for his Second Reading speech, if any. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per convention, I will not make any statement on that but allow the floor for debate.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and we will follow the Batting Order accordingly. We will proceed with the Honourable Shadow Minister for Economy, who has been allocated the same speaking time as the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications during the delivery of his Budget Address. I now call upon the Shadow Minister for Economy and Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, to deliver his speech.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Economy, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament, and I also send greetings to our young students from Namadi, who are here with us; welcome.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also would like to join you in welcoming His Excellency the Ambassador Switzerland, who was kind enough to come and visit us on Friday; welcome Your Excellency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency mentioned a lot of things about his country;. You have been there so you know how beautiful it is. I do not know whether you actually skied when you were out there, but it is a beautiful country.

I was fortunate to have managed the Pacific Rugby Team in 2008, comprising Samoan, Tongan and Fijian players, who toured Europe. After the game in France, we went by bus and we drove through your country, looking at the beautiful mountains, and it is a great nation.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, their flag has a white cross on a red background. He did not tell me this, but I understand that the white cross on a red background is the story of a great country. Out of the bloodshed of civil wars and *coups*, they have managed to build upon the cross the thought of sacrifice by a great country that now boasts (correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Ambassador) a GDP of US\$678.9 billion and their per capita GDP is US\$82,538. Honourable Speaker, those figures were respectively for 2017 and 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of the gloom of civil war and *coup*, previous to that was the occupation by foreign leaders and governments. Out of all that, they have managed to build a modern society, a really modern society that can boast a GDP of US\$678.9 billion in 2017 and per capita of US\$82,538 in 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that that great nation can boast a boom. They are justified if they talk about a boom in their country. However, if we talk about a boom in Fiji, I am afraid there is nothing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. I welcome boom at home. My wife who is here at the gallery, likes using this because it cleans up the mess at home, the mess I make on the clothes I wear. For now, we need a more powerful boom to clean up the mess that we are in.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for the address two weeks ago. Incidentally, it was on the night of 7th June, 2019, and the day before that the whole of Europe, United Kingdom and we saw footages of President Trump visiting Her Majesty the Queen and joining the people of the United Kingdom, France and other European countries celebrate or commemorate D-Day, the day that *Operation Overlord* was launched to recapture or retake Europe and liberate it from the Nazi Germany. Today, Sir, I rise as Shadow Minister for Economy and Leader of the Opposition, to respond to the 2019-2020 Budget that was presented on that night.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reiterate your opening remarks at the Budget announcement on Friday, 7th June, 2019 and I quote:

“...the Budget Announcement and the Budget Debate are significant events in the Parliament calendar. The announcement ... this evening enables the Government to articulate its intentions and key policies as well as its forecast for the next financial year... tonight’s significant event draws public and media attention...”

He went on and addressed those who were listening in.

The focus of my response, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will be limited mostly to the issues at macro-level, while other Honourable Members of the loyal Opposition will also contribute in the Debate, covering specific areas they have selected to speak on, in particular their Shadow Ministerial portfolios and the Sector Select Committee they participate in.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Members of the Opposition for allowing me to be the spokesperson for finance and economy. I am the spokesperson for the economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I am the Leader of the Opposition. Sitting behind me and beside me are more qualified Honourable Members to be speaking on matters of economy.

One of my colleagues is a professor in the area of economics, and more than one of my colleagues are chartered accountants and highly qualified, so they have agreed that I should be the spokesperson on economics because economics, as we all know, is a matter of leadership, particularly, budget. It is about leadership of a nation, so regardless of who presents the Budget, it reflects the leadership of the Government.

We are not here simply to oppose, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we see ourselves as a team of quality controllers, ensuring that the legislation we enact into law and other decisions made in this honourable House are in the best interests of the majority of the people of Fiji. We are here to ensure that the Appropriation Bill before us and its Consequential Bills get the full scrutiny, objective assessment and the debate that the people of this country deserve.

I remind us all of the Oath or Solemn Affirmation that we took on 26th November last year, when we became Honourable Members of this Parliament, and I quote:

“I,...., swear that as a Member of Parliament of Fiji, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Republic of Fiji, and I will obey, observe, uphold and maintain the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and all other laws of Fiji; and I solemnly and sincerely promise that I will defend the rule of law and the rights of the people, and will act with integrity and diligently carry out my responsibilities in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and the law. So, help me God.”

This is the Constitution of Fiji, and these are the Standing Orders that regulate our conduct in this honourable House.

I also carry my own personal Constitution. It is a bible that was given to me many, many years ago by a friend. Those of you who may have read the story of Charles Colson, a victim of Watergate. He was counselled, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before his trial, during his trial, and while he was incarcerated in prison.

He was counselled by a man named Doug Coe. Doug Coe became a very close personal friend, the man behind the National Prayer Breakfast conducted in Washington every year which brings together over 4,000 kings, presidents and leaders of countries all over the world. He wrote a note here and there was some scribbling's on the front page. The note is: "To my true and beloved brother in Christ, our prayers are with you always. Mathew 6:33: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given unto you."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last week we had prepared for this Debate, after listening to the Honourable Minister. We were prepared, we were sharpening our knife to come here and vigorously defend what we believe to be the interest of the people in Fiji.

I remember when I was a young boy, we would go out with my father to the garden and he did not trust me with the file, so he filed my knife. After sharpening it, and I was not paying attention, he would run the file once or twice over the blade, blunting it. I did not know what it meant, until I learned to file my own knife and realised that he was blunting the knife. I asked him, 'why did you have to blunt the knife?' He said, 'Because you are too young, you could hurt yourself with a very sharp knife.'

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was Trinity Sunday, and I am sure most of us observed that in the church that we went to. And before that, we had *Eid* celebration, and prior to that the *Ramadaan*. One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, you know, Sir, is self-control, so I had to blunt my knife. I had to blunt the knife so that I remain audible and understood in this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Budget was announced by the Honourable Minister for the Economy at prime TV time, when people were at home. I know that not many people would be watching me and most of us who speak today because they will be at work or at school.

It is unfortunate that the coverage of the Opposition Members response will be limited because most of the people are working and away from their television screen. I do not know whether it is deliberate or unintentional or just the fortunes of timing, but I know that the people will not be convinced after what they have seen over 13 years of getting lies under a dictatorship.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome those who had taken time to watch the debate on television and livestream. My Budget response will also be available on my website and social media page, at our official SODELPA website, and social media platforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in his very salutation paragraph, the Honourable Minister greeted those watching the proceedings and addressed them via Walesi application channels, boasting that it was happening for the first time.

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, Sir, something will happen that has never happened before. That is, the nature of nature. That is the dynamic nature of time. That is the nature of growth and it is natural. The development of Wi-Fi and Walesi systems of communication to enable some, who did not have those applications and means, to have something new, watching the Budget Address broadcast live is commendable. In fact, they are developments built on the venture that the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Government, under my leadership, Mr. Speaker, are initiatives of introducing television, internet and Wi-Fi services to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last week there was a fire in Nadi, and perhaps, for the first time, there was media coverage on the basic disconnect in our emergency communications infrastructure. Something so simple, that could save lives and property, but which appeared to be in the "too hard basket" for the officials involved at the Ministry of Communications.

In Fiji before, there was only one emergency number - 000. The so-called requirements of progress now dictates that we have many numbers for the different emergency services, and neither seemed able to refer those seeking help to the right number they needed. It seemed like a comedy of errors, but is, in fact, a tragedy that saw a popular group of entertainers, the Vou Dance Group, lose all their musical instruments and belongings, their lifeline.

Interestingly, the Reporter for the *Fiji Sun*, Sydney Gonzalez, highlighted that it was "a case of an ineffective national communication system". His words, not mine. The Reporter from the *Fiji Sun* (I believe), a part of the FijiFirst's public print media network, Mr. Speaker, Sir, wrote on 11th June, 2019, and I quote:

"The owner of VOU Dance Fiji, Sachiko Soro, blames the extent of the fire damage on an ineffective national communication system.

Unfortunately, Ms. Soro and the dancer's experience is something that has been experienced by other Fijians."

I am still quoting from this *Fiji Sun* article. We have seen published recently two stories detailing the pitfalls of the country's emergency communication system.

"The Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF), which is responsible for distributing numbers, called for the implementation of a single national emergency number along with a national call centre to man it.

In response to these claims and stories similar to that of Ms. Soro's, the Ministry of Communications said they were open to TAF's idea, but that the issue wasn't something that they were aware of.

"When you're in an emergency, you're not thinking clearly already, so when you have to remember multiple numbers, it's hard," she said.

"None of us knew what the fire number was. We were frantically trying to call any combination of emergency numbers we could think of," she said.

"We were all panicking and distraught."

She also said that she checked the NFA website but could not find the contact number, and they ended up losing all their equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of us have participated in some sort of team sports where, when we suffer defeat or an earbashing from the coach for poor performance. I remember you saying this to us when you were captaining the officers' team. When our late friend, Colonel Kaci, dropped a few passes, you would get to him and say, "Kaci, get the basics right. Get the basics right!" That is what we would like to tell the Government of today, let us get the basics right. Also, it is all very good that we have the latest technology, but let us get the basics right.

Telecommunication systems must work. There must be cohesion between technology and human resources. You may have achieved 50,000 *Facebook* engagements in your Budget consultations, yet a simple group of humble musicians lost their lifeline because one basic but vital communication link did not connect. In this incident and other ones your Newspaper outlet intimated, “Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Minister for the Economy, you have failed.”

Expectations for the Budget: Every year the people of Fiji, investors whether local or from overseas, and development partners, look forward to the Budget announcement which articulates Government’s intentions for our economy in the next financial year, and the country’s future prospects. The Budget announcements also review our performance at the macro level, and going right down to sector and subsector levels. Unfortunately, very little discussion on facts of the Budget, but mostly self-praising and destructive criticisms of former national leaders and those who disagree with the Government.

Interest from all stakeholders is on whether the Government will continue to take an expansionary approach to further stimulate the economy or a contractionary approach to dampen demand in an economy driven by consumption rather than productive investments, and address risks (both, internal or external, including natural disasters), that we should anticipate in the short and medium term.

Each stakeholder has their own interests, but it is the Government’s responsibility to address overall risks associated with the good management of the economy for the benefit of the whole nation rather than a selected few.

For ordinary Fijians, Mr. Speaker, Sir, their expectations will be high as to what action the Government is going to take to cushion the high cost of living by putting into place the right policy mix to reduce the cost of basic food items and services.

Basically, ordinary Fijians will be looking at how the Government will empower them to achieve their personal aspirations, particularly better standards of living and a brighter future for their children, and not freebies. That is the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they want to enjoy a better life, and to be better off than what they are achieving and experiencing today.

For investors, their interest is to see if the Government will provide the enabling environment, the confidence and incentives that make it worthwhile to invest in Fiji. The bottom line for investors is consistency of policies and a stable legal framework to safeguard their investments, and whether policies will ensure reasonable expectation for a high level of return on their investments. The basic prerequisites or ingredients are not there today under this leadership.

Development partners will be keen to see if policies in place are consistent with their respective development agenda to supplement the delivery and assistance available to be given out. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that if we do not adhere to basic principles of democracy, freedom of expression, human rights and good governance, among others, very little help will come our way.

The Government of the day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is responsible to all the people of Fiji, and not just those who voted for FijiFirst Party. For me, Sir, I have very high expectations, anticipation and hopes that the Budget announcement will address key structural constraints and challenges that our people are facing today, and their plans for our future. I also wanted to see how Government will address constraints and challenges the economy is currently facing.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am disappointed with the Budget Address. More so, I am worried about the future of my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren (I am a great-

grandfather now, Mr. Speaker, Sir), because there is nothing in the Budget to assure them or give them confidence that there is hope in their future, there is hope for them in the future and it will remain at the same trajectory.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not at all surprised with the Budget announcement. It is another grandstanding speech, full of talk, a lot of hype, self-praise of Government actions, lacking depth, and totally lacking vision for our collective future. They are, again, my first constitution.

The Budget will hurt the poor more and benefit the selected few businesses, who will continue to fill their pockets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the reduction in expenditure, the national debt will continue to increase. As usual, it is full of big ideas, full of poor policy framework and poor service delivery.

There will be more abuse of funds, corruption and mismanagement of public funds because very little attention has been given to the recommendations of the Office of the Auditor-General, an Office under your own Government machinery.

The confidence of the private sector will continue to erode because of the inconsistency of policy and lack of stability in the nation.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the honourable Minister, that I sat here for 2 hours and 14 minutes and did not interject nor laugh loudly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be discussing all those issues in detail later in my response.

I come to the honourable Minister now. I am surprised that he is like this. His father served with me in Parliament and never did what he is doing.

(Laughter)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I acknowledge his presence in the House today. I remember him as a very humble man, full of humility, but he was very hard hitting, very hard punching when he came back with his report of the Public Accounts Committee.

The honourable Minister for Economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe, has no respect for this august House, let alone, the honourable Members on this side of the House. Instead of trying to steer the ship in the right direction with vision and compassion to bring about unity, I believe he spends too much time ridiculing the Opposition, criticising us or the previous Governments, and boasting of the Bainimarama achievements or boom. My boom packet is empty!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, boom is full of powder that produces bubbles.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- You will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the term "Fijian" is synonymous and associated with a number of basic traits. These traits include;

humility, respect for one another, cheerfulness (the Fijian smile), willingness to listen, accommodating, reciprocity, rugby, a life of sacrifice and service for peace, caring for one another, among others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many of my associates and some members of the public have called me or told me at the meeting earmarked for the announcement last week, shared the same sentiment that the Honourable Minister's behaviour in Parliament is uncalled for. His unparliamentary behaviour undermines this august House, the highest court of the land, which is a repository of authority and sovereignty of the people of Fiji. Instead, he makes it look like a circus. In Fijian, they say, and I quote in Fijian, and I hope it would be translated, "*Sa rui levu na viavialevu, na dokadoka kei na veibeci.*" And a gentleman from my own *tikina* (district) used his old Bauan language, I quote, "*qavuqavu drasa*", which means, the extremes of ungentlemanly behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would probably know that we still speak the genuine Bauan dialect in Navatu. You and the Honourable Prime Minister probably have forgotten that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the general reaction from the public seems to just yet tell, the Honourable Minister for Economy has lost the plot and cannot admit his weaknesses and "Khaiyum-nomics". The "Khaiyum-nomics" model has run out of steam and failed the people of Fiji.

It is time he admits his failures so that the people of Fiji, with our common purpose, can all work together as a nation, to make the necessary adjustments to rebuild our beloved nation due to the misguided policies and bullish expenditure and wastage of taxpayers' funds brought about by the Bainimarama doom and gloom, rather than boom.

But unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is common knowledge that the Honourable Minister for Economy will never practise what he preaches to bring about unity to our nation. He created more division and hate among our different communities. From now on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, take into account the insults and humiliation to the Fijian people, particularly our former *iTaukei* leaders, I will now continue to use the term "the people of Fiji" rather than the "Fijian people".

For me, this consolidates what a close friend and former seasoned politician, who sat with the Honourable Minister for Economy's father on the Opposition side of my time, and he said this about the imposition of the term "Fijian" and all citizens of Fiji. I called him "uncle" and I still call him uncle, although I am 71 years old. And he called me "Sir" in those days and still calls me "Sir" now, although he is much older than I am.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he said, "I am happy to be a Fijian Islander and be called an Indo-Fijian because I do not want to lose my identity, my culture and my belief. Deep inside me, I know that I am of Indian origin. So, why should I be called a Fijian because I will be faking and be disloyal to my true identity, my culture, my language and my belief."

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is all in the Constitution! It says everyone is a Fijian.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I know, I know that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I prefer to call everyone, "the people of Fiji". I do not offend anyone when I call them "people of Fiji". Despite that fact that I called him uncle, he still calls me "Sir". That is Fijian.

We should be proud of our own unique identity and embrace our multicultural, multi-religious, multiethnic, multilingual society. We must continue to recognise our diversity, and embrace unity and peace among our communities, which should be nurtured as a pillar of strength.

My message, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, we should be proud of our own individual origins and recognise that we must live together in peace and harmony as a multiracial country so that we can all progress together, appreciating our own individual unique identity.

The need for a bipartisan approach to solve the nation's ills, Mr. Speaker, Sir; in my maiden speech in this honourable House, I assured the nation that as Leader of the Opposition, I am willing to work with the Government for the betterment of the nation and to improve the lives of all the people of Fiji.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Hear, hear!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- This genuine offer has been rejected on many occasions. A number of motions and petitions on issues of national interest and foster unity have been totally rejected by the Government. They refused to work together with us for our common good.

It is important for the Government to realise and appreciate that we are losing the confidence of the people of Fiji. They must be practical and realistic and work with the Opposition in resolving mismanagement and poor governance that we all have experienced in the last 12 or 13 years.

The Government must realise that its public popularity is diminishing. There are good reasons for this, and they should consider it seriously that they look at those weaknesses that the people are seeing and come to the table for a *talanoa* as they vigorously promote. They should stop the blame-game that the Opposition and previous Governments are responsible for all failures.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2014 General Election, the FijiFirst Party had a clear majority of almost 60 percent of the valid votes cast while in 2018, only 50.02 percent of the people who cast valid votes, voted for the FijiFirst Government. The results might have been different with the 171,000 registered voters who did not turn up, had cast their votes, and also if there was more transparency in the election process and legislation in place which are a hindrance for the people to make informed decisions in selecting their government.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Economy spent a fair bit of time boasting and claiming "incredible and unprecedented progress" they have made in extending access to technology available for people to interact with each other. The availability of such technology has grown and now become a national dialogue amongst our citizens (the budget discussion), particularly the National Budget consultations, is available, now we can all participate. But as I had said earlier, they need to get the basics right.

Mr. Speaker, common sense tells us that technology evolves and continues to improve as time progresses. There is nothing to be boastful about. The question, Mr. Speaker, is the effectiveness of that consultation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during our time in national leadership, we did not have access to the advanced technology that is now available, but processes were developed and put into place to ensure genuine consultations rather than mere window dressing, vote-buying and manipulation.

When technology was not as advanced as it is today, we had very well organised mechanisms where we had consultations with grassroots people through the Provincial Councils, District Advisory

Councils and the dedicated Select Committees of Parliament, to consider and endorse proposals by Government through the National Economic Summit.

The intention of this approach, Mr. Speaker, was to foster the participation of all stakeholders, ensure transparency and accountability and engender ownership of Government policies and programmes, instead of the heavy handed approach of the Bainimarama-led Government, particularly its Minister for Economy, whose fingerprint and footprint can be seen in every arm of the Government.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that as technology improves, we have to look at innovative ways to use technology to our benefit. It happens overtime as we progress, there is nothing to be boastful about. The next government will inevitably have access to more advanced technology and come up with more innovative ways to consult the people and seek their consent. The question remains whether the quality and effectiveness of those consultations, and whether Government truly has the people's interest at heart when making those policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another example today is the availability of high-tech heavy construction equipment. In the early 1970s and 1980s, we only used bulldozers and most other activity undertaken is manual labour which was laborious and time consuming. Today, we have the technology for all types of work, which is more cost-effective and efficient, and takes half the time to implement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 1979, I attended the Indian Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, Tamil Nadu, which is part of the Madras University at that time. Every time we went down to the city, we would see these workers, including ladies, carrying crushed metal on baskets on their heads. They were constructing the first nuclear power station in Madras, using their bare hands and baskets carried on their heads.

Today, Mr. Speaker, despite high-tech equipment available, the cost of construction of infrastructure continues to skyrocket. Just look at the upgrading of less than 5 kilometres of road between the Denarau junction and the Airport at a cost of more than \$66 million; that is an average of \$12 million per kilometre, and there are no bridges. I believe that is wastage of taxpayers' money. Engineers will tell us that, that is the most expensive road construction in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in his Budget Address, the Honourable Minister for Economy spent about a fifth of his time criticising previous Governments and giving empty political rhetoric rather than focusing on the Budget proper, which is very important to all the citizens of our country, investors and our development partners. He spent more time boasting and campaigning rather than giving a clear explanation on how the Budget has been drawn up, how funds are allocated and its short and medium term implications for the people of Fiji. It is nothing new and it is common practice for the Honourable Attorney-General to manipulate the truth to suit his own agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my suggestion during the pre-Budget Press Conference on the 2019-2020 Budget is for Government to consider consolidating Government finances. This recommendation is based on figures from the Bureau of Statistics, Reserve Bank of Fiji, and my own and my staff assessment on the findings of our multilateral development partners, which has been similar and consistent.

We, as a nation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, must cushion the impact of the volatility in the international environment and address our domestic challenges collectively. If we do not make the necessary adjustments, the economy will move into a more precarious situation and the country will be on the verge of collapse.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I made it very clear at the pre-Budget Press Conference that my intention was not for political rhetoric or gain political mileage. My comments were made in a constructive manner, for Government to consider as we move forward in the spirit of genuine dialogue.

It is unfortunate that as usual, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General normally turns genuine observation and constructive comments into an opportunity to attack the SVT Government that I led and me personally.

It is not the first time that he has brought up the NBF saga in this august House, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I made it very clear in this august House and in public statements on the failure of the NBF that as a leader, I took full responsibility because I was the then Prime Minister.

As a Government Chief Legal Advisor, the honourable Attorney-General should know the laws that cover independent constitutional offices and their respective functions and responsibilities. Their independence is safeguarded constitutionally to ensure the Central Government does not interfere with their legal mandate. One of these independent institutions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Reserve Bank of Fiji which is responsible for the management of our foreign reserves, manage inflation and to independently monitor the operations of financial institutions in Fiji, including banks.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You were a shareholder; you appointed the Board.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- My interest as a shareholder was taken through the Board and not mine personally. It was a government shareholder.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The people of Fiji know that he has a hand in most of the decisions taken by these independent institutions now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problem of the NBF did not only occur in my time, it started before that, but that is no excuse. There was an ongoing problem before I became the Prime Minister. It was clear to me when I was briefed that a fair share of the Bank's portfolio was concentrated in a few businessmen and businesses.

When the problem was brought to my attention, I acted swiftly to minimise any further risks. I did not shy away because the savings of the citizens of Fiji were at risk. People responsible were taken to task, and some people have served jail sentences. The honourable Attorney-General should get his facts right and put the issue in its proper perspective.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did not cause the crisis but rather I solved it. The honourable Attorney-General should also be asked to explain to the people of Fiji:

- How much it had cost to cancel the Naim contract which he negotiated with an interest rate of 6 percent, which was much higher than the normal 2.52 percent issued by multilateral institutions.
- What happened to the One Hundred Sands Casino deal and the \$100,000 per month penalty that he was to levy for non-implementation?
- What happened to the Waila City Development?

- Why is the Government paying bonuses to CEOs of institutions that are making losses?
- What is the cost of the damages at Malolo Island to current and future generations? Who is responsible?
- What is the cost of the damage done to the island of Nawi in Savusavu?
- Blatant financial mismanagement totalling millions of taxpayers' dollars identified by the Office of the Auditor-General in the last 12 years, who is accountable?

The Honourable Attorney-General should come clean on all the latest saga, rather than dwelling on what happened 23 years ago, which is water under the bridge.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy sounds like a broken record, bringing up issues that had been addressed and settled over 20 years ago.

HON. MAJOR GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take heed of the honourable Minister for Economy's suggestion and draw his own attention to it, that we must be analytical rather than trying to gain five minutes of fame.

When reviewing the 2019-2020 Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I looked at the following:

- Whether the Budget is compliant with the Financial Management Act 2004;
- Take into account the international trading environment;
- The domestic environment, particularly macro-economic indicators and sector performance;
- Review of the Budget trends in the last five years in terms of revenue and expenditure;
- Whether the Budget is aligned with Government's 5 Year and 20 Year Development Plan; and
- Whether consideration has been given to the findings and recommendations of the Auditor-General's Office in the Auditor-General's Reports.

With regards to the Financial Management Act 2004, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the basic principles of responsible financial management which must be adhered to, include to:

- manage finance over the medium term on a responsible and transparent basis;
- manage revenue and expenditure in such a way as to achieve a prudent level of debt;
- ensure value for money in the use of money and resources;

- manage contingent liability in a prudent manner; and
- report transparently in accordance with relevant accounting and statistical standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, basically the Financial Management Act 2004 is very clear on how a budget should be prepared in terms of processes and procedures to be followed, and the need to adhere to good governance principles, particularly on transparency and accountability.

Generally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the budget in the last three years have failed miserably. Based on assessments available from my experts and international development financial institutions - the World Bank, IMF, ADB, et cetera, there is an urgency that we have to make some adjustments to manage headwinds or to manage the risks associated with volatility in the international market.

We all know that there are real risks associated with the:

- trade war between the United States and China;
- impasse between the United States and Iran which could lead to conflict;
- volatility in the prices of primary commodities in the international markets;
- likely increase in the price of crude oil which is almost one-third of our annual import bill; and
- risks associated with climate change that we cannot ignore. The intensity, severity and regularity of natural disaster is now a common phenomenon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I took some time to review the World Bank Report with the heading. “Managing Headwinds”. I was very much interested to understand the term and bring it to our local context. Later on, after my review, after reading all these, I realised that I can draw some measure from the explanations to my own experience, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

As a small boy growing up in my village of Drekeniwai under the ridge, you know the name of the ridge, ‘Naisogolaca’, there is the little village of Drekeniwai. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, we did not have access to roads on both sides of Natewa Bay - “*Baravi ni koro nei Nau*” as the honourable Minister for Women calls it. The only mode of transport, including from her village, was by wooden boat or open punt powered by 5 horsepower seagull outboard motors. The road head was Matakunea or Nasinu at the bottom of the Bay.

I recall when the sea was rough, the Buca Bay would become very rough. When it was rough due to very strong winds, particularly the headwinds, people would normally travel if we have to, taking the sick or taking copra down to Savusavu, we would have to take risks. But I remember when loading up the boats or the punts, there would always be some unhusked coconuts (two or three dozens).

We would complain that that would be taking too much space on the boat. We would ask, why are the coconuts here? We want to sit down on the *cote* (the little plank that we sat on). The elders on the boat would say, “*Tiko lo, sega ni kila e dua na ka. Vodo mada ga.*” Later on in life, we realised that the two or three dozens of coconuts would be used as a life buoy or also drinking water and food, should we not able to complete our journey.

The journey those days would take up to four hours to get to the road edge and if the captain did not manage the headwinds well, we would have to go to shore or swim ashore. I believe our Prime

Minister, as a former captain and Commander of the Navy, knows only too well how difficult it is to manage headwinds because at times it can be unpredictable. The risk is high in terms of loss of lives, damage to property and if you are not careful or cautious, grave disasters at sea. The same applies to our economy and our country.

On the domestic scene, honourable Speaker, Sir, we must also appreciate the dynamics of our domestic environment, narrow-based export, and primary commodities. We depend too much on two sectors only, the economy is driven more by consumption rather than productive investment; and the decline in the value-addition to our manufacturing and resource-based sectors.

The Bainimarama-led Government has been taking an expansionary approach since it came to power in 2006 and the results have been appalling. It is time that we, as a nation, must put aside our differences, political beliefs, ideologies and collectively work together to minimise the risks of our economy collapsing. We should take heed of the advice given by our experts and confirmed by our international and regional financial institutions that we must address our challenges head-on now rather than later.

Multilateral and bilateral arrangements: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Economy usually boasts that Fiji punches above its weight in the international arena through the Bainimarama-led Government efforts. It is sad to note from the budget announcement of the closing down of our embassies in Ethiopia and Brazil. This is a clear indication that policies were not well-thought out to determine the benefits and the cost of establishing new embassies around the world. These are also the hallmark of the Bainimarama-led Government where everything is based on trial-and-error at the expense of the taxpayers.

The honourable Minister for Economy, Honourable Speaker, spends a fair share of time in presenting the budget on the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Annual Meeting held in Denarau in May and Fiji chairing the World Bank Small Islands States Forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is nothing to boast about. Fiji has been a member of these two financial institutions since Independence because we are members of UNESCAP - The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir, knows very well as a Former Minister of Finance that Fiji attends these meetings annually, where Pacific Governors meet and submit proposals collectively to the Bank for consideration.

Fiji, on a number of occasions, has been a member of the Remuneration Committee. There is nothing new, Mr. Speaker, because it is business as usual. The only difference this time is that we hosted the meeting, and by convention, every third Annual ADB Meeting is held in Manilla, while the other two annual meetings are held in a member country out of ADB Headquarters in Manilla.

Former Ministers of Finance have also chaired ADB and World Bank meetings, so there is nothing to be boastful about. Landmark events that we should recognise, Mr. Speaker, are the establishment of Pacific Regional Offices for both institutions, by the Qarase SDL Government which the Minister for Economy intentionally forgets.

The opening of the Regional Offices in Fiji laid the foundation for better relationship that leads to where we are today. The interesting question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is whether we have managed to secure loans at concessional rates from both institutions to boost investment in that country in the last 13 years.

I believe the reason for the lack of support from both institutions is Government's poor track record on good governance and the issue relating to human rights. I believe the only law given to Fiji

during the Bainimarama-led Government through the emergency window is to help the country in its rehabilitation efforts after natural disasters.

It is worth noting that instead of going to the World Bank or ADB for concessional loan, the Minister for Economy decided to borrow from the Exim Bank of Malaysia, with higher interest rate which was later cancelled due to unfavourable terms on our side and from their side were the lack of key, clear guidelines or implementation.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Minister for Economy is talking about possible concessional loans for climate change-related projects. There is no doubt that the Board of these institutions fully appreciate our vulnerability to climate change.

It is nothing to do with the pressure from the Bainimarama-led Government because our shareholding position is very small. The access by Fiji to concessional climate change funds depends on the criteria set by the Board rather than on the influence we exert on it.

Since Fiji joined both these institution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, after independence in 1970, just to remind the young one on the Government side, Fiji was classified as an old CR borrower because our GDP per capital is the same level with other developing countries.

Basically, this means we can only borrow from the Banks ordinary resources rather than from the concessional loans with no interest, but the 1 percent administrative charges. Compared to our neighbours like Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, among others who have access to ADB Funding from the Bank, while some countries have graduated, others still have access to that window.

It is interesting that a number of concessional windows have opened up, particularly the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), however the issue that we must consider is our current debt level which is around \$5.649 billion and 46.7 percent of our GDP. With additional debt, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a concessional or from ordinary resources of those Banks or from other sources or bonds, they all have to be repaid.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the claim of a Bainimarama Boom in the last 12 years is overstated, it is misleading. In my view, Sir, the Bainimarama-led Government has brought more hardship to the people of Fiji than prosperity. Only a select few are better off than the majority of our population. I will provide data to prove my point.

As a layman Mr. Speaker, Sir, my understanding of an economic boom is a peak phase in the business cycle, an upwards stream of strong growth. Key economic indicators such as GDP increase substantially, so does productivity since the same number of workers create more goods and services. An increase in sales, increase in profits and income occurs, all these indicators reflect a boom; when they do not it is kaboom.

I do not think this is the case in Fiji in the last 13 years; it has been kaboom for the last 13years. To determine whether there was a boom or kaboom during the peak phase of the cycle, we have to review our performance over that period. I absolutely agree with the Honourable Attorney-General who continues to insist that we must be analytical in our assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to confirm whether there was boom in the last 13 years, I have reviewed the real GDP growth since our independence in 1970. If we breakdown the last 49 years into ten year periods, it is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that Fiji experienced the highest GDP growth rate for the

period of 1971 to 1980, straight after independence. We have a clear growth rate of 3.4 per cent. That was followed by 3.6 per cent between 1981 and 1990. From 1991 to 2000, the growth rate was 2.4 per cent and for the period from 2001 to 2010, it was 1.4 per cent, and between 2011 to the rate forecast for 2020, it will be around 3.2 per cent. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, claim of a boom, is not true.

When broken down into five year periods, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the highest growth rate of 5.9 per cent was for the period from 1971 to 1975, followed by 4.1 per cent for the period of 1986 to 1990. In 2011 to 2015 it was only 3.6 per cent and from 2016 to the 2020 forecast, it would average around 2.7 per cent. Reviewing growth rate in terms of figures, the figures show that during the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's era beginning in 1971 to 1987, the growth rate was 3.4 per cent.

During the SVT era of 1992 to 1999, the growth rate was 3.2.6 per cent, up 0.2 per cent. Growth rate average of 2 per cent from 2001 to 2006 under the Qarase leadership. Mr Chaudhry was there for only one year with 1.7 per cent. The Bainimarama-led Government between 2006 and 2018 averaged 2.4 per cent. Nothing to boast about, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Despite the crisis faced by the late Turaga Bale Tui Nayau, due to increase in oil prices, the average real GDP growth rate was still the highest ever achieved for Fiji. Sadly, he was put in the same basket as Qarase and I when they criticised the previous Governments. During the Qarase period he faced leadership crisis and the global financial crisis but still achieved 2 percent of GDP growth. The Bainimarama regime did not face any major crisis either domestic except for the natural disasters normally experienced by successive governments or international and international environment was favourable. Mr. Speaker, Sir, yet their average real GDP growth is only 2.4 percent compared to the *SVT Government* which also had *Tropical Cyclone Kina* which damaged two major bridges and still managed 3.6 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to review the Budget measures in the last three years and see whether they have been realised or they have materialised. In the 2016-2017 Budget Announcement the theme centred on "The Future: a Strong Fiji, a Fast Fiji and Healthy Fiji. We will build a society where people have more options and greater opportunities to make their own choices for their own good. We will clear the way for all Fijians to broaden their horizons to ambitions we have never seen. Democracy rests under the idea that ordinary Fijians are capable of extraordinary things. In a democratic society the test for any government's strength lies not in those in control or prescribed for its people but what it demands for itself; that was their statement.

In 2017-2018 they said this, "Empowering Fijian families, Raising Productivity, Capacity and Unlocking our True Potential". Economic empowerment is important not just to lift individuals and have them succeed. It is the only way to build a vigorous economy and ensure a robust democracy for the long term.

For the 2018-2019 Budget the theme was, "All Fijian Families Matter". The FijiFirst Party promised we will be building on the opportunities already provided for the Fijian people to prosper and refine the unprecedented development that has transformed our nation's prospects with another bold and historic national budget.

For the 2019-2020 Budget Mr. Speaker, Sir, the key themes are "The future facing Budget that builds on the unprecedented achievement of the Fijian economy and looks ahead with confident expectation and ambitious expedition. A vision that prioritises the prosperity of our people today and protects the well-being of generations to come and responsible and practical management of the economy."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether these statements and the accompanying Budget provisions have achieved or realised its original intentions for the people; no. The key criteria in determining the outcome are as follows:

1. How has the increase in GDP been distributed?
2. Why is there an increase in the cost of living?
3. Why is there high unemployment?
4. Why is there an increase in poverty?
5. Why are there low levels of effective investment from the private sector?
6. Why is there a continuing decline in export and increase in imports?
7. Why is there substantial increases in the import of used cars?
8. Why is our infrastructure in a poor state despite more than \$2 billion injected since 2012?

The delay in rehabilitation of the severe *Tropical Cyclone Winston* now three years after the tragedy, is unacceptable; a mis-match between labour market demand and supply, increase in national debt, decline in foreign reserve, increase in crime among others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on economic growth which is measured by GDP, the figure seems to suggest that Fiji's economy is performing well but the bottom line is whether that GDP growth has been equally distributed to all the people of Fiji. The question is whether the people of Fiji are much better off now than before? This will be made clearer as we continue our assessment on the Budget Mr. Speaker, Sir. The incidence of poverty continues to increase, the cost of living has increased, more people are living in squatter settlements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and household income is stagnant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my father and I borrowed from Housing Authority; at that time there was a Scheme with Housing Authority, a Borrow and Build Scheme. We borrowed money, \$5,400. We had a little block making machine, we mixed the concrete, put it in the machine, hammered it together and put it in the sun to dry. Then block by block we built our house. When I came back from Lebanon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 1981, our loan was \$5,460. My father must have been late a few months and our loan went from \$5,400 to \$5,460. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that little house is now worth a lot more than that. But the system then allowed us to get out of the crowded three bedroom house in three miles where all the six families were renting.

GDP, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Economy continues to boast about the GDP growth figures. He claims that GDP growth has more than doubled the size of the economy in the last 12 years. That is not true at all, Mr. Speaker. He continues to manipulate the figures to suit his own agenda and to make him look good.

Despite the constant reminder, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this august House that we should be objective in our assessment, be analytical and not give the wrong information, and I quote, "No politicians 15 minutes of fame should be allowed to come at the expense of the health of our economy." He himself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is guilty of his own assertions and accusations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, people know me; my friends, my family and many people around Fiji know me. If I came here with a wig one morning, they would laugh, because they know me. The same has happened with the people of Fiji. When he comes in and he says that everything is real, nice and good, they know the truth.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Minister for the Economy should be comparing apples with apples rather than apples with oranges. He is the only one who is trying to get his two hours of fame at the expense of the economy. This august House and the people of Fiji needs to be told the full truth rather

than the lies and manipulation of facts to make him look good, which is also contrary to the Financial Management Act of 2004. Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I suggest to the Honourable Minister for the Economy to look at the figures in their proper context.

If he wants to compare growth performance over a period of time, he should consistently be using the same benchmark. Therefore, the GDP figures in real prices would be more appropriate rather than using current prices for the Bainimarama-led Government and real prices for previous Governments. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, Sir that the revised figures for the GDP in 2019 is around \$11.09 billion and a constant price at \$8.26 billion, and that is in your Budget Supplement, Page 75. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when reviewing the figures provided by the RBF on the 10th of May, 2009 the provisional figures for real growth was around \$6.931 billion. The figures of 2017 are a revised estimate and for 2019 a forecast.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2006, our real GDP growth was around \$5.497 billion. In 2012, it was around \$5.819 billion, in 2017 it forecast at \$6.931 billion. It is estimated to be around \$7.1 billion at the end of this year. The truth Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the real GDP did not double at all in the last 13 years explained by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy. However, it has continued to increase slowly at the same steady pace over the last 30 years. There are good reasons for that Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, there are challenges and constraints that we face because of our vulnerability and our narrow based economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many examples where the Honourable Minister for Economy continues to manipulate the figures for his own agenda. I believe his misinformation to the people of Fiji catching up with him and the Honourable Prime Minister will sooner or later realise that the Honourable Minister for Economy is misleading the nation, not telling them the truth and a political viability for your party.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, growth should be reflected in the well-being of the people. As a former Commander, as a former President and the Honourable Prime Minister as a former Commander, the well-being of the soldiers is paramount, the well-being of the people is paramount.

Fiji is considered the middle income developing country based on our current GDP per capita. This incidence of poverty in the economy is 48 percent, 28 percent living in poverty, below poverty line and another 20 percent facing hardship. That is clearly confirmed in the Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) that was carried out in 2013-2014, it showed that 28 percent of population already living below the poverty line with another 20 percent on the margin.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is almost 50 percent of our population facing hardship. The number of people facing hardship today will be much close to 60 percent if a survey is carried out because our macro indicators are either declining or stacked. The question Mr. Speaker, Sir, if whether there is ever been more than 50 percent of our population facing hardship.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now would like to turn to our national debt. I am of the view that our debt is high. I believe that the acceptable level of debt of Fiji as a benchmark for small island vulnerable developing in economy with very limited resource and endowments should be around 40 percent of GDP. While this is a benchmark which we should try to achieve in the long term there should be flexibility. However, if it moved above 45 percent of GDP, it should start ringing alarm bells and

necessary measures need to be undertaken to review the status of our debt and the mix of portfolios so that it can be better managed. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that our debt stock has to be paid whether they at concessional rate, special rate or market rate, they all have to be repaid.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the end of 2006, our accumulative debt since Independence, that is over 40 years, was \$2.8 billion. Based on the 2019-2020 Budget, our debt level would be hovering around \$5.8 billion, which means that our debt stock have more than double. If we include our contingency liability, our debt level will be more than 60 percent of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some may argue that there are other countries like the United States, China, Malaysia and large economy, which have accumulated debt over 60 percent of their own GDP. We cannot compare ourselves with these countries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because their own resource endowment is much different, much greater and their internal capacity and population density is also very different. We must also compare apple with apples and not apple with oranges.

In reviewing our debt level, Mr. Speaker, Sir, page 44 of Budget Supplement, our debt stock has increased from \$4.38 billion in July 2015 to an estimated amount of \$5.63 billion in July, 2019. The increase of debt will be around 46.7 percent of GDP.

Out of this total debt, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$5.63 billion; \$4.13 billion or 73 percent is for domestic debt and the balance of \$1.5 billion is our external debt, 27 percent.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that external debt is increasing which simply means an additional drain on our foreign reserves.

In discussing our debt, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must also take into account the amortisation of the debt portfolios and interest payment. In 2014, our total debt servicing was around \$443.6 million, and is estimated to be \$617.13 million in 2019-2020; an increase of 40 percent, which is quite substantial. Interest alone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, increased from \$264.27 million in 2014, to \$353.43 million in the 2019-2020 Budget.

The overseas loan repayment was around \$84.2 million in 2014, and that will increase to \$123.3 million in the 2019-2020 Budget. It is interesting to note that the Honourable Minister for Economy is suggesting that we are going to raise funds through green bonds, blue bonds and other bonds. Whether it is blue, green, yellow, purple or soft loan, they all have to be repaid, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our current foreign reserve is declining due to the increasing gap, since our imports are outstripping our exports. Any additional external borrowing or raising of bonds will further increase our repayment of both principle and interest.

We must learn to live within our means, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A sad reality is that our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren will have no choice but to pay for our mismanagement and lack of vision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government should take heed of the concerns raised by the Auditor-General in the last couple of years that recommend:

1. That Government needs to improve its technical capacity and expertise to better manage our debt stock.
2. Our debt level is too high and increasing.

3. There must be better understanding and targeting of public borrowing.
4. Poor reporting mechanism needs to be improved so that we can have timely and accurate reporting on our debts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there have been talk in this House and outside of our own liquidity level. Some argued that the current liquidity level is not sufficient while others claim that it is adequate. For me the level of liquidity is important, but what is more important is the confidence of the private sector investors to borrow and invest in productive investments rather than consumption.

Today, our economy is driven by consumption rather than productive investments. The major reason for the lack of major investment in the country is because the private sector investors and entrepreneurs do not have confidence to invest due to the inconsistency of government policies that will secure a good return, a fair return on their investment. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the erosion of human rights and good governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I bank with a bank since the 29th of January, 1968. I borrowed from them and they have reminded me of late repayment of my loan, but we have a very good relationship. When I went back to borrow for an investment, they were reluctant and eventually said 'no'. Then I said 'don't you trust me? I banked with you since 1968', and they said, 'Boso, we cannot tell you what is going on', 'okay, and thank you'.

Productive investment is dependent on a number of pre-conditions Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is worth noting that today, only 11.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is investment by private sector and public enterprise with only 8.1 percent being government. For Fiji to grow sustainably, we need to invest 25 percent of our GDP. It is unfortunate that the private sector investment has declined from 12.9 in 2014, to 11.4 in 2017 while Government investment continued to increase from 4.7 percent in 2014 to 8.1 percent in 2017.

The Government should provide an enabling environment for the private sector and public enterprises to invest rather than what we now see, the government crowding out the investment sector, crowding out private sector investment.

The Government should concentrate on its own core function and allow the private sector to take the lead role in investment because Governments are inefficient and ineffective in carrying out investment. Investment is very critical for creating employment opportunities and provide necessary income to generate and provide the necessary income. The one I wanted to borrow for would really improve the lot of the rural 'kai Cakaudrove', Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are a lot of claims that people are fully employed. It is unfortunate that the figure do not truly reflect the employment trend. Although unemployment has decreased, it is still high. Underemployment is quite high because people do not have full time jobs and some of them are seasonally employed.

We have to be mindful, that with the increase in population, unemployment will also increase proportionately, which means that the true employment figure will be much lower than the official figures. There is a strong correlation between investment and employment. As investment increases, employment opportunities will also increase.

Inflation Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the general increase in prices and a fall in the purchasing value of money. Today, we all experience that the prices of goods and services continue to increase, but the

value of our income continue to decline in real terms. It means that when we go to the supermarkets now, we spend the same amount of money but we take home less than what we used to.

Today's inflation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is around four percent. Income must always be on par with headline inflation so that the value of our money does not decrease when price is increased. Therefore the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) is necessary. It used to be a feature in previous Governments to cushion the impact of inflation. It is unfortunate that income for workers have not increased in the last three years. Mr. Speaker, Sir, minimum wage during my time was \$2, now, it is \$2.78.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very difficult for a layman to argue against doctors with PhDs. I asked my uncle what "PhD" stood for and he said, "It is just a phony identity."

Our foreign reserves, Mr. Speaker, Sir, continue to decline. Our cost of living continues to increase. We must manage our foreign reserves by reducing imports and increasing exports. We need to budget so that we encourage our local producers, particularly in the rural areas for import substitution programmes.

In 2009, the difference between our imports against exports was \$1.5 billion. Today, the gap is about \$3.3 billion. We have to look at investment opportunities in our resource-based sectors where we have comparative advantage and the Government must take a targeted approach for maximising benefit for all stakeholders.

Our balance of payment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on the low side. Our current account balance increased from 4.12 percent in 2011 to 5.79 percent in 2019 while our capital account balance declined from 9.03 percent in 2011 to 6.1 percent in 2019.

Now, I look at the key sectors in our economy: Agriculture, cane and sugar productions. Cane production continues to decline from just over two million tonnes in 2011 to around 1.7 million tonnes in 2018 despite the injection of more than \$400 million by the Government during that period. Due to the decline in cane production, sugar production has also declined from 160,000 tonnes in 2011 to around 150,000 tonnes in 2018. The low price of sugar in the international market will have a major impact on our foreign exchange earnings.

Non-sugar agriculture: Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is quite discouraging to note that the agriculture sector contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues to decline. In 2005, agriculture contribution to GDP was around 10 percent; today, it is down at six percent. Nearly 48 percent of our total population resides in our rural areas and depend very much on agriculture for livelihood and income. In addition, 52 percent of our population living in urban centres depend on agricultural produce such as root crops and vegetables.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government policy on food security has failed despite all the hype by the former Minister for Agriculture to revitalise the agriculture sector. Food security is a basic human rights and it is at risk. It is also draining our foreign exchange earning which is on a decline because we import more than 40 percent of our food products.

Most of the imports of agricultural products can easily be grown in Fiji sustainably. There has been too much emphasis on the sugar industry rather than trying to strike a balance with non-sugar

agriculture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge your role in working with the Sugar Marketing Authority when you were our representative in London, working with both, the UK Market and the European Market at that time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no genuine commitment by the Bainimarama-led Government to allocate the necessary resources to the non-sugar agriculture. The cancellation of the Alternative Livelihood Programme (ALP) and the Rural and Outer Island Development Programme (ROI) in 2007 clearly shows the lack of commitment to the agricultural sector.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Check in the Budget, that is incorrect!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- The \$800,000 token allocation for non-sugar agriculture is not sufficient to address our term for ensuring food security for our people. That is our long term goal, food security.

I sincerely believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we should move away from subsistence farming and focus more on commercial scale farming through a well-developed mechanisation programme. Better research and development are indeed, and the robust marketing of our local products which are on demand both, in the international and domestic markets. This will also support, encourage and incentivise resource-owners to better utilise arable land that is available to them.

It seems, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there is a deliberate move by the Bainimarama-led Government to undermine opportunities in non-sugar agriculture to support and improve the standard living of resource-owners so that they can become self-sufficient and independent rather than relying on Government assistance.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Where did I say 'race'?

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, freebies and handouts provided by the Government has created a dependency syndrome among our people, particularly now the indigenous people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also remind me of the old Chinese proverb, that if you give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you fed him for the rest of his life. Teaching a man to fish will help him sustain his livelihood rather than just giving him food for a day.

On tourism, one of the key indicators on the performance of the tourism sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is visitors' arrival. Although, there is a slight improvement in visitor arrival, we could do better. The Maldives have reached \$1 million mark in tourism on tourists' arrivals, despite their late entry into the market.

Fiji has been in the tourism market for a long time and have all the necessary ingredients to attract more visitors, but today after 30 years or more, our visitors' arrival is only 800,000. However, Mr. Speaker, today Fiji is considered a very expensive tourist destination. For every dollar that a tourist spends, 30 cents is taken by Government as tax and charges. This is a disincentive for tourists to come to Fiji, and they opt for cheaper destinations and better value for their money elsewhere.

The support given to the shipping industry is welcomed, particularly the removal of VAT for purchase of ships and vessels which is the main mode of transportation in our maritime zones. We only ask that the quality of the ships and the age are properly monitored.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the grant of \$29.7 million to Tourism Fiji is welcomed, but tourist arrivals do not only depend on promotion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SVT Government was the first Government that actively promoted and funded tourism promotion. As I have said earlier, we must relook at our costing to be competitive with other tourists' destinations.

People go for holiday when they have savings and the performance of their home economy is buoyant. When they have savings due to increase income from a vibrant economy, they will have access to money to go for a holiday.

As the economies of our major source markets decline or go into recession, very few people will travel for a holiday. Therefore, the amount of money poured into advertising and promotion, while they matter, is not the whole thing. Our imperative environment with our source markets must be kept relevant.

A fair share of the \$29.7 million for the marketing for tourism can be better utilised. I have my tourism expert who will talk on that, particularly at his time when you are looking at health tourism, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L RABUKA.-...and we need to look at health and medical facilities in our major tourist zones. We have the unfortunate incident two or three weeks ago and that must be resolved, and the Honourable Minister for Health, I am sure, is working on how we can improve those.

Gold Production: Mr. Speaker, Sir, gold production continues to decline since 2011, despite the increase in the price of gold in the international market. I was surprised at how much one ounce of gold now costs. Those who are older will remember that the price of one ounce of gold used to be either the price of one suit (I am wearing my new suit today), way, way below the price of one ounce of gold. But gold had always been a steady indicator.

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L RABUKA.- Timber Production: Mr. Speaker, Sir, although we are in a peak of harvesting our plantation forests – pine and mahogany, timber production continues to decline. It is very important to review what has gone wrong, and at the same time consider

a robust replanting programme to replace the unsustainable pace of harvesting, and hopefully, our 4 million tress will come in useful if we are planting the right kind of trees.

Timber production has dropped from 500,000 cubic metres in 2010 to around 200,000 cubic metres in 2017. It was anticipated that it will increase to around 250,000 cubic metres in 2018 and 2019 and a moderate increase to 300,000 cubic metres in 2020.

Fish Production: Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite opportunities to take advantage of industrial fishing available to us, the production of our fish resources continues to be flat for the last five years. While our neighbouring countries in the Pacific region are taking full advantage in harvesting the tuna migratory species, Fiji continues to lag behind due to poor policies to support the sector. Our production has been flat since 2010.

Government Reform Agenda: Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt and we all agree that as we progress, we must make necessary adjustments in a timely manner so that we can respond better to the dynamics of a changing market environment.

A lot of hype on the robustness and success (I have been reminded of my time). I heard the honourable Minister spoke for a short while, and I thought that I was interested as I was listening to him as he went on, but I have been told I do not have that much time left for me.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reformed agenda of the Government promoted by the Minister for Economy where he placed a lot of emphasis on innovation, improvement of processes and procedures and structural changes to ensure that Fiji is on par with international benchmarks on good governance. The short answer to that is that the claimed reform programme by the Bainimarama-led Government has again failed miserably at a high cost and at the expense of the taxpayers of this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reform is not something new to Fiji. Most of the reform programmes currently undertaken by the Bainimarama-led Government was initially pioneered by the SVT Government that I led. While some people were busy in their effort to derail the Government, some of them even turned into making home-made bombs, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- For Fiji to be able to compete in the international environment as a member of WTO we have had to make the necessary adjustments to deregulate the market for the goods and services, labour and financial markets to allow Fiji to be able to compete effectively. To support the reform in these key markets, we also have concurrently carried our private sector reform through public enterprise and financial management reforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SVT Government took Fiji into the WTO discussions. The first Earth Conference that was held in Rio, we sent our Minister for Environment at that time, the late honourable Kaukimoce. Since then we have been at it and 23 years later, we become the President of COP 23.

The only difference, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of previous government's reformed agenda from that of the Bainimarama reform agenda is that we take a more systematic approach where reformed programmes are harmonised, properly sequenced, take into account existing capacity, cost and long term impacts on the nation. Most importantly, Sir, the key ingredient to success in any reformed agenda is consultation with all key stakeholders. The process fosters ownership of the reformed agenda by all stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have noticed that in the last couple of years, major reform initiatives have been undertaken in an *ad hoc* manner dictated to the stakeholders rather than through dialogue, consultations and *talanoa*. This has also led to the high cost resentment amongst stakeholders, uncertainty poor policy development and a lot of inconsistency. Very little have been achieved from the Civil Service Reform. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is more inefficiency and increase in costs. One just has to look at the increase in expenditure particularly personal emoluments, which continues to rise.

A review of the Permanent Secretary's salary structure and public service salary structure will show that rather than having a uniformed pay structure, it has distorted to favour a select few and discriminate against Fijians. The reform in the education sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a failure because it lacks consultation and lack of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of how the education system in Fiji has evolved whereby the Government works in partnership with the community to improve education in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the failure of the reform in the FRA whereby the Government works in partnership with the community to improve education in the country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the failure of the reform within the FRA where millions of dollars have been spent with very little to show for, the chickens have come to roost in the 2019-2020 Budget, where allocations have been reduced from around \$600 million annually to \$400 million in the next financial year. There are many examples of failures in the reformed programmes in Fiji which other Honourable Members of the Opposition will be highlighting in their own responses. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the lack of confidence, inconsistency of policy, lack of investments and poor governance which is the order of the day.

Taking into account information available and constraints, I have identified and said on the eve of the Budget announcement. I am of the view (and the Honourable Attorney-General criticised me for having that announcement before his) that Government should immediately stop its expansionary approach and what I term the "Khaiyum-nomics Model" and try and consolidate the Budget to ensure that fiscal space is available to cushion the impact and any looming challenges which may turn into an economic crisis in the short term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that reminds me when the SVT Government won the elections in 1992, some of the Senior Cabinet Ministers who had the experience insisted that we should increase the budget by over \$300 million for the 1993 financial year to finance promises made during the campaign. Instead of increasing the Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I took heed of the advice by officials from the Planning Office and the RBF that we must take a cautious approach, rather than trying to fast track expenditure because of our vulnerability as a small island to satisfying our promises in the election.

Fair enough, in 1993 *TC Kina* struck Fiji with damages costing around \$200 million at that time. In today's value, damages would be around \$500 million. It was fortunate that we had fiscal space and adequate resources available to immediately carry out the rehabilitation efforts which included the construction of the new Ba Bridge and the Sigatoka Bridge at a cost of \$14 million.

The rehabilitation of the sugar industry took one year with a bumper crop, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the following year and it is reflected in the production of that year. Rehabilitation was undertaken within two years compared to the rehabilitation effort severe *TC Winston*. It is more than three years now, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is clear indication that the Bainimarama-led Government did not take into account the risks of our vulnerability, despite all the hype. Due to the lack of fiscal space, there were delays in rehabilitation phase, to make it worse, they have disbanded institutions and mechanisms that were in place to support emergency response and rehabilitation after natural disasters.

We must try and maintain our current revenue trend which is already quite high as a percentage of GDP and reduce wastage which is a hallmark of the Bainimarama-led Government. We have to

redirect Government resources to support sustainable economic growth in the short and medium term and ensure a fairer distribution of our growth. We have to put into place prudent management of our debt, we must reduce our debt to at least around 45 percent of GDP and cut unnecessary expenditure.

The Government should reduce its investment portfolio and encourage the private sector to be the engine of growth through productive investment. Policies put in place must be consistent and provide incentives for investments. These investments would provide employment opportunities in the labour market

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- That is what Committee stages are for, Honourable Minister.

We have to direct resources to our resource-based sectors; agriculture, fisheries and forests for value addition activities to improve our foreign exchange capacity which will in turn improve our foreign reserves and reduce our imports. Emphasis should be redirected at revitalising the non-sugar agriculture sector for food security and to boost foreign exchange earnings. Better targeting of our social sector spending in education, health, poverty alleviation, women in development and youth is necessary to ensure better value for money.

There is too much non-targeted assistance to these sectors therefore the focus should be identifying those who really need assistance and be given the support rather than the current arrangement where every Tom, Dick and friends are getting assistance. To be able to carry out a fair and objective assessment of the implications of the reduction of the 2019-2020 Budget, it is necessary and practical to revisit our revenue and expenditure at least in the last four years. A review in the last four years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will give us a better understanding of how we should move forward. Experience and lessons learnt from the Budget in the last four years will surely share some light on the best and most practical way forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a percentage of GDP, total revenue increased from \$1.42 billion in 2014 (23.7 percent) and is estimated to increase to \$3.49 billion in the 2019-2020 Budget. This is an increase of 27.5 percent while total expenditure in 2014 was 27.6 percent or \$1.64 billion of GDP. The 2019-2020 Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Budget estimates that expenditure will be around 30.2 percent of GDP or around \$3.84 billion; a reduction of \$809 million from 2018-2019 Budget Estimates that we are now discussing. Some people will wonder, did we waste \$809 million last year?

On the revenue side, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is interesting to note that actual revenue increased from \$2.38 billion in 2014 to \$3.23 billion in 2018-2019 and anticipated to increase to \$3.49 billion in the 2019-2020 Budget; an increase of 8 percent.

Based on the current scenario, Mr. Speaker, Sir, expenditure will be reduced by 17 percent and revenue will increase by 8 percent. It is unfortunate that the gap between the estimate and the actual continues to grow. The variation is unacceptable because it is a clear indication of poor budgeting, poor forecasting which is also highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report. The margin of error is too significant and I believe it is intentional to inflate revenue figures, to reduce the deficit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not confident and cannot trust the estimated net deficit of 2.7 percent of GDP in the 2019-2020 Budget Estimates, and I believe it is grossly underestimated because there is a lot of inconsistency in the Budget Estimates and the Budget Supplement.

Mr. Speaker, one just has to review the revenue figures in greater detail, they clearly show a large variation in revenue collected over the years. In 2014 there was a shortfall of \$350 million, in 2016 there was a shortfall of \$337 million, in 2017-2018 a shortfall of \$612 million and in 2018-2019 there was a shortfall of \$980 million.

In the last three financial years, there were shortfalls from investing revenue. In 2016, a shortfall of \$244 million, 2017-2018 a shortfall of \$368 million and in 2018-2019 a shortfall of \$368 million; and 2018-2019, a shortfall of \$389 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this clearly shows that there has been no proper budget planning or very poor planning. They have not been able to apply the Budget to the situation in Fiji while looking at the international environment at the same time. They must be prepared for the ups and downs in the international market for those they need to have fiscal space. They need to be prepared to handle whatever comes without turning again to borrowing. We cannot afford to increase our borrowings, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are already up to our necks.

As our former Commander used to say to us, "Living like kings on peasants' wages." Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are supposed to be kings. We are supposed to be looking after the interest of all the people. We are supposed to be looking after their welfare and the way we expend and raise capital is the prime responsibility of leaders. That is why I am taking the portfolio of Shadow Minister for Economy while I have some better qualified experts behind me to support me. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, as I had indicated earlier, we will stick to the Batting Order that has been worked out previously, and all speakers after the first speaker this morning were allocated 20 minutes. We will stick to that Batting Order and to the times. So, I ask all those who are going to speak to take heed of that, administer your material and administer your time.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the next speaker.

Honourable Members, before I give the floor, if you are thinking that there is going to be morning tea, we are going to have morning tea and lunch at the same time after this. As I told you before, you can have the freedom of going in and out when you need to. I have to sit here and listen to everything, so we will combine both. I now give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and the Sugar Industry, the Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama. You have the floor, Sir.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to deliver my response to the 2019-2020 National Budget. At first, Mr. Speaker, I would like to open by again expressing my congratulations to our HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series Sevens champions...

(Applause)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ... who through a combination of talents, perhaps a little bit of prayer, once again, put Fiji on top of the world.

As we open this week of debate, Honourable Speaker, some will emphasise the supposed differences between each side of Parliament. Meanwhile when we think back to cheering for our boys as they played in Paris glued to our television sets throughout the nations surrounded by families, friends and neighbours, that sense of unity, that communal pride and passion is what should inspire us

when we look at the Fijian economy because just like when we watched rugby, we ultimately all share in the outcome.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the health of Fiji's economy, our political legions should not matter. I am not saying that we here in Parliament should all agree on all things. That would be unrealistic, healthy debate is what drives a healthy democracy.

HON. MAJOR GEN. (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- *Vinaka.*

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Disagreeing with certain expenditures, policies or even philosophical approaches is all part of politics. But there is a fundamental difference between healthy debate on one hand and actively working to undermine our national economy on the other.

The latter, Mr. Speaker, crossing the line from healthy debate to attempted destruction is precisely what is being done by the Members of the Opposition. It started earlier this year with Honourable Lynda Tabuya's false claims that our banks had insufficient liquidity. All you have to do is ask the experts and they will tell you that these claims have no merit. Honourable Tabuya is not a banker and is certainly no expert on the matter, but what she lacks in economic experience, Honourable Speaker, she makes up for her ability to spread gossip and rumours.

In a country of Fiji's size, Honourable Speaker, lies can spread quickly and the more times a lie is told, the more people start to believe it. It is a phenomenon that I am sure all Fijians watching at home can relate to. But when that rumour is merely elevated to the national stage, it can have very real consequences. If someone hears that there is an economic crisis, people can stop spending, investors may re-think of opening a new business when manufactured fear impacts economic activity, it goes beyond a political disagreement.

It is, as our Honourable Minister for Economy puts it in the budget announcement, the economic sabotage of the highest order to everyone across the country tuning in on their televisions or smart phones, I want to put an end to these rumours right now. The Fijian economy is strong and our liquidity levels are more than sufficient.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- It is a good time to invest, it is a good time to do business in Fiji and seek employment. Those are not social media rumours, Honourable Speaker, those are facts.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, what the Opposition needs to understand is, there comes a heightened level of responsibility that comes with being a Member of Parliament. You are not running for office anymore, in this job, you have a duty to protect the Fijian people, the Fijian economy and the Fijian nation as a whole.

I only wish, Mr. Speaker, that when the banks around the country came out and said that Honourable Tabuya's claims were blatantly false, and that liquidity levels are indeed healthy, this should be the end of the Opposition's attempted economic subversion.

Unfortunately, the day before the 2019-2020 National Budget was announced, as you have heard, Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Sitiveni Rabuka, chose to one-up his prodigy by declaring to the cameras that the Fijian economy was on the brim of an economic

collapse without any idea of what was in our Budget. To top it all off, when asked whether he had any economic plan of his own to present as an alternative, he said that he had none.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Very poor!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- This, Mr. Speaker, coming from Mr. Collapse himself, the very man at the helm when the National Bank of Fiji collapsed harming the value of the Fijian dollar and putting the country into a path of debt that my Government, as you have heard from the Minister of the Economy, is working to pay off to this day.

During last year's Elections, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition campaigned on the fact that he was a changed man, pleading for forgiveness and promising that the irresponsible behaviour of his past was behind him, but during that press conference when he spoke about collapse, before he even saw the contents of this National Budget, was proof that his old reckless habits persist to this day, he has not changed.

I thank Mrs. Rabuka for being present today as he has mentioned. He has brought Mrs. Rabuka's name into his talk of the boom. I want to apologise to Mrs. Rabuka that her name has been brought in, in relation to the boom. The boom has nothing to do with what we have talked about in relation to what the economy is doing. It has to do with the washing of their clothes but I am very concerned that the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa has no boom packet in front of her.

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Do not put it under the table, put it on top! But the boom really, Honourable Speaker, is to clean up the mess that he left on us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, the success of my Government speaks for itself, there is no collapse. The Fijian Government speaks for itself. The Fijian economy is entering into a record straight year of growth. Its decade-long streak is unprecedented in our history.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Speaker, spoke of the decline in gold production. He has not told us really the story of the decline in the gold production because it is an old mine and it is owned by a private company. It has nothing to do with Government, but what he has forgotten to tell everyone is that he is responsible for three devaluations, twice in 1987 and again in 1998. I apologise ...

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Three!

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ... by devaluing the Fijian dollar by over 50 percent, our foreign reserve is much more than when Honourable Rabuka was PM. He is responsible for three devaluations, as I said, twice in 1987 and again in 1998. He is single-handedly responsible for increasing the cost of living for Fijians by devaluing the Fiji dollar by over 50 percent. He talked about the old Chinese saying (I thought he was going to come up with a Chinese song, the Ching Taowa) but

...

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ... the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) grant, Honourable Speaker, is exactly that - teaching people how to fish. When we talk about the empowerment, they keep referring it to “freebies”. I cannot figure out if they can come up with better terms than that, and as I said, gold production is declining because it is an old mine. It is owned by a private company.

I apologise, Honourable Speaker, I hear a lot of *Bible* readings from across the room, but I cannot see anybody in white. I thought Honourable Karavaki was still around. I do not have a *Bible* with me, I do not carry one. But I want to tell Honourable Rabuka that we have this wonderful app. in this technology that we have, and I carry a *Bible*, only a little bit bigger than what he has got in his pocket. If he needs an app., I can give him one out of the 500 that are in this technology that we have.

Honourable Speaker, over these 10 years, our economic expansion has been consistent. Year after year, after year, after year, we have broken records, lowered unemployment, improved our debt to GDP ratio and, of course, improved access to roads, clean water, to electricity and education. Through this decade, something else has been equally consistent year after year, and of course it is the Opposition’s rejection of the National Budget crafted by this Government, which has been the blue print for our economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, you often hear quotes of great leaders. History remembers those who are proven right, but, in many millions of words that are spoken all too often, we forget the words of those who are proven wrong. After all history renders them meaningless. Can you imagine a rugby commentator projecting the outcomes of nine games in a row and being consistently wrong every time. Would you still trust their opinions going into the tenth game? I do not think so Honourable Speaker.

Indeed, if we look back over the past 10 years of Budget rejections by the Opposition, Honourable Speaker, you can see that they have been proven wrong and wrong again. Every year, they dig in their heels, preaching of some doomsday scenario that never comes to being, and every year the Fijian economy improves and grows.

While the Honourable Leader of the Opposition seems to like the word, ‘collapse’, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad prefers, ‘crisis.’ Back in 2010, I remember before the current decade-long boom, he published a paper with a bleak outlook on the Fijian economy titled, “Global Crisis, Domestic Crisis or Crisis of Confidence; which is the way forward for Fiji”, Honourable Speaker, it is quite a title.

Honourable Speaker, in this paper he said that Government should have been adapting expansion to fiscal policies in our Budget rather than efforts to consolidate. Nevertheless, his crisis never unfolded.

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Then five years later, half way through our current boom, he tried a new angle in his response to the 2015 Budget back when he was the Honourable Shadow Minister for Finance, not just another member among the Opposition ranks. He criticised our expansionary approach saying that, ‘the roads and bridges that we are building to better the country’s infrastructure network, were bad investments.’

He voted against that Budget and again the economy grew. I think it is clear Mr. Speaker, that Honourable Prasad and his colleagues on the side of Parliament are far from economic profits. While

they continue to shout that the sky is falling, FijiFirst will continue to lead the country on a path of responsible financial management.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We lay out the framework of our Budget on a future facing basis, considering long term trajectories. These Budgets are guided by objective and analytic thinking not short term gains or political posturing.

Mr. Speaker, the 2019-2020 National Budget is no different. It is the continuation of my Government's long term vision for our country's future. The same vision that has brought us into a decade of growth. We have outlined 5 Pillars to this Budget and every dollar spent will be an investment in one of these Pillars that is:

- Strengthen law and order;
- Protecting our natural environment;
- Empowering young Fijians (not freebies);
- Basing technology and innovation; and
- Building certainty in an uncertain world.

What more can you ask for? This Budget has been crafted with careful consideration and consultations from Fijians in every corner of the country. Their input is what truly matters to this Government and their future is what we fight for with every single budgetary allocation under every single Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud to personally oversee the Sugar Industry as the Honourable Minister for Sugar Industry where I work at home to sustain the industry's effectiveness in the competitive global market and abroad to strengthen the reputation of Fijian sugar in the minds of buyers around the world.

Just last week, I had the pleasure of opening the crushing season for the Lautoka Mill which, following extensive new upgrades, is looking to smash the figures it put up last year in crushing cane. The reason why this crushing season is shaping up to be a success is not only due to those new upgrades, it is owed to the entire range of support that my Government has introduced and steadily funded to support the Fijians who rely on this industry's vitality.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who follows the world sugar market will know that we are currently faced with a forecast of the global sugar surplus for 2019 and 2020 and this latest surge in production follows months of volatile pricing and ongoing uncertainty in the market place as changing policies, subsidies and weather patterns have cast an impenetrable form over the future. It has left vulnerable to this sweeping viability, Fijian cane farmers being squeezed out by the big boys in India, in Brazil in China and others who have deep enough pockets to weed out this period of instability.

Fijian cannot influence trends in the global markets as large as sugar, nor can we predict where the price of sugar will head. But, what we can do is protect our cane farmers from these ebbs and flows of the international markets and shield them from dramatic streams in the world prices. We can make ourselves a more competitive producer by modernising the industry and making it more efficient. We can lessen input costs to our farmers widening their profit margin, establishing certainty, confidence and a firm sense of direction, for our cane farmers, our lorry drivers, our mill workers, and all those who rely on health of our sugar industry.

The 2019 and 2020 budget increases the allocation for the sugar industry to \$70.4M, up \$8M from last year. That allocation Honourable Speaker, will continue to fund the sweeping range of support my Government has introduced to assist our farmers as part of the strategic game plan for achieving long term viability for this industry. Number one, that allocation will continue to subsidise guaranteed cane price in Fiji of \$85 per tonne.

Now, the forecast of market prices in sugar is currently hovering around \$56 per tonne, so that is around \$30 extra per tonne that Government is covering, all for the benefit of our cane farmers and that price is guaranteed through this year and next year. That is on top of the subsidies, the cost of weedicides and fertiliser, which have grown more generous rising to \$25.59 per tonne and through our comprehensive mechanisation push, Honourable Speaker, we are outfitting the industry with dozens of harvesters, tractors and six-wheeler trucks, and we will soon be receiving a report from the Indian Government outlining the blue print for a massive upgrade of our national railway systems. Once that network is in place, we will be able to transport much larger loads of cane on the rail system, reducing cane cartage costs even further.

There will be a report coming out, Honourable Speaker, on the STM Project that brought about Exim bank funding received for \$50.4 million and the contract was signed in November 2005. The works contract was issued in January 2006 and projected delays and projections in execution lasting until June 2010, but total STM Project cost finally capitalised by FSC was \$180 million in 2010 and 2011 financial year.

There will be an investigation into this, Honourable Speaker, as we have spent a lot of money on something that was totally useless. The total losses to FSC came to \$154 million for this STM Project back in 2000 and 2006. When we talked about fiscal consolidation, Honourable Speaker, during the period, our commitment to the sugar industry has not stalled or retracted, we have strengthened it and we will continue to keep our faith in the Fijians who make up this industry not by talking and certainly not by telling lies but by giving our farmers the support they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to acknowledge the allocation made to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs over the next year the ministry will do more or less. We will look towards our strategic objectives namely enhancing leadership training, documenting our culture and traditions and building resilience in the midst of an increasingly globalised world.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the Ministry for expanding upon the role that it was mandated with in the iTaukei Affairs Act 1944, involving the Ministry to adapt to an evolving economy and changing society. Since 2010 the Ministry has branched out from cultural preservation alone to now look at the broader socio-economic issues that affect our *itaukei* communities, including child protection, sustainable environment, sustainable farming and conservation, to name just a few. As our traditional leaders work to address this modern issue they have a steadfast ally in my Government.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2019-2020 financial year the Department of Immigration under my purview, will undertake new initiatives to strengthen border control services. These include the production of e-passports for easier border entering, the implementation of new e-gates at the Nadi International Airport, closer integration with Interpol, building our IT and Intelligence capacity and engaging in a comprehensive review of all current laws, regulations and processes for all immigration services.

Specifically, we will be setting extremely high standards for the attainment of the Fijian citizenship, opening up the right to work for spouses of Fijians and creating new categories for permanent residents. We will make changes to the issuance of work permits and collecting new fees from foreign applicants that will then directly fund up-skilling our local Fijians. In bringing about these

changes we will build a business friendly environment while recognising the need to bring in the skill sets required in the modern, thriving and sophisticated economy.

Mr. Speaker, my time is winding down but I want to be abundantly clear that the 2019-2020 National Budget is strong. This budget is responsible as I have said, it will streamline our businesses and build confidence, despite the Opposition's best efforts and it will care for our people in a way that continues our booming decade of economic prosperity.

In his Budget Response, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy of course coined this decade the Bainimarama Boom and while the new title may be catchy, and I think a bit cheesy, the success cannot be attributed to me alone and in fact the new phase represents something very familiar. Over the past decade we have known when to expand and when to contract, we have known when to strategically invest and when to do it. Our economy has soared through the best of times and endured through the worst of times. We have faced down international head winds and even the global financial crises head-on and we still came out on top.

We have been through the strongest cyclone ever to make landfall in the southern hemisphere, ravaging our economy and wiping out a third of our GDP, and we still came out on top. As we enter into a new age of uncertainty, today is no different and while I have been at the top as we charted this decade of growth our boom is attributed to a much greater effort. Indeed, it has truly been a team success product of type of cohesion that the disorganised Opposition can only dream of. Most importantly Mr. Speaker, this booming decade has been carried on the shoulders of the hard working Fijian people.

Economies are not built by politicians but they are built by the people. The Minister for Economy and his team have worked so tirelessly every year to put this Budget together, to every Fijian shopkeeper, hotel worker, engineer, farmer, IT professional, teacher, fisherman, banker, taxi driver, a business person, garment worker, police officer, artist, nurse, factory worker, electrical linesman, clerk and civil servant. I thank you as your Prime Minister for bringing Fiji to the position of strength where we sit today.

Together, we will continue to build on this progress and together we will move our nation forward. With that Mr. Speaker, the 2019-2020 National Budget has my full and resounding endorsement. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members we will now suspend proceedings for lunch. Lunch will be provided for in the Big Committee Room and Parliament will resume in an hour. The Secretary-General will indicate to you when we will resume. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 1.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the Budget Debate, and I now call upon the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity. I rise to contribute to the 2019-2020 Budget, that was announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, and which is the subject of Debate of this House now.

From the outset, I would say the Budget is a realisation by the Honourable Minister of the fact that it had been over-spending for over 12 to 14 years for the sake of a modern Fiji, in particularly, the years 2014 and 2018, the General Election years, to buy votes. It worked for FijiFirst Party in 2014, but it lost six seats to SODELPA in 2018, proves that you can fool people sometimes, but you cannot fool people all the time. Next time in 2022 or earlier, you will be out, it will be sooner rather than later.

It is quite stark that the Budget, Honourable Speaker, Sir, has:

1. signs and symptoms of corruption and abuse of tax payers funds;
2. reduction of \$1 billion dollars expenditure will be and is a shock to the economy, but we knew in advance, it was coming;
3. clear under performance of all key productive sectors;
4. lack of resources given to productive sectors; and
5. economic sector budget reduced after reckless budgets of too many lies over the last four years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Economy had repeatedly quoted, "Unprecedented achievement of the Fijian economy," by the Bainimarama FijiFirst Government. This is not the truth!

(Laughter)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Let us look at the figures of over the years, if you had listened carefully to what the Leader of Opposition had just said, from Independence, the true achievements are as follows:

Budget revenue: Trends from 23 percent to 30 percent or \$1 billion to 2009 to \$4.5 billion 2018-2019 now reduced to \$3.5 billion, which is an overestimate, poor budgeting. Expenditures had never gone near the Budget Estimates that means too much expectations; over budgeting and it is very poor.

Expenditure trends: The percentage continue to increase from 27 percent to 30 percent. Thus budgeting by expenditure rather than by revenue achievable and collectable. Budgeting by expenditure is a negative and risky approach. We will now find the hard way. GDP growth rates (from RBF release) in 1971 there were better achievements in 12.7 percent in 1973, 12 percent in 1979, 12.9 percent in 1989, 8.7 percent in 1999, and 2.7 percent is projected for 2019. How can that be an unprecedented achievement when it is the least growth?

Let us see this in 5 years and 10 years intervals the same picture is there cannot be an achievement for only 2.4 or 2.7 achievement growth for the last 12 to 14 years. Who is Honourable Khaiyum trying to fool? He just fooling himself.

Now let us see the performance by each Honourable Prime Minister in GDP the average growth rate were as follows:

- The late Ratu Kamisese Mara 1971 to 1991 was 3.4 percent,
- Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka in 1992 to 1999 was 3.6 percent; and
- Honourable Bainimarama for 14 years at only 2.4 percent.

How can you call that unprecedented?

So the other single-handedly are comparatively better achievers than the FijiFirst Party Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government. By the way, who is the Honourable Prime Minister here?

(Laughter)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- By the book it is Honourable Bainimarama, but in practice it is Honourable Khaiyum.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Bainimarama just hang on that is how the people are interpreting, reading it, know and understand it.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Now let us turn to imports and exports 2008 to 2019. Imports forecasted from 3,601 in 2008 to 5,679.8 in 2019, while exports from 1,471 to 2,344.9 in 2019. So the gap is widening meaning increasing rate of imports and reducing rate of exports increase, wider and wider for over 14 years FijiFirst Party and the Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government whether individually or jointly still cannot arrest the widening negative impact of our economy. Shame on you two!

Unemployment increase from 11,000 of 3.7 percent in 1996 and in the Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government still has not been able to reduce it to 3 percent or 4 percent level. Investment share of nominal GDP only in 2013 did FijiFirst Party Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government ever invested what is called encouraging level investment at 25 percent of GDP.

All the other years since 2006 up to 2017 are all well below the 25 percent mark at 19 percent and below. What is particularly worrying is the increasing and wider investment by Government through expenditure while the private sector is reducing and narrowing investment to 2017 and that negative trend is likely to flow onto next year, 2020. How can one call himself a Minister for Economy and does not encourage increasing or wider investment by the private sector. How it can be? We ask ourselves that question.

Who is or are benefiting from this growth?

1. The elites few rich people for example 100 percent tax allowance for FNPF, reduced corporate tax other corporate incentives.
2. Urban dwellers, this Budget just focus in administrative, social sectors and digital technology, financing, insurance, urban developments and operations et cetera. Note Acts to be amended are incentive for investors in the urban areas only.
3. Expatriates at permanent secretary levels FijiFirst Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government does not have faith in Fiji's own educated local people.

4. The haves, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister for Economy repeatedly announced Bainimarama economic boom when referring to GDP growth, rather it is doom. But what boom? GDP growth boom were in 1973, 1979, 1989 and 1999. Figures for Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government are well below those, how you can honestly say you or labelling it a boom.

It is beyond imagination, the Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government only can do with straight faces. Boom for whom? It is for the pockets of the rich and forget the poor that is what it is I am afraid. This FijiFirst Party Khaiyum/Bainimarama-led Government needs a good clean up with boom it needs a bigger packet like this rather than a small one.

Increasing debt value at high level is written a record frightening one at that IMF, World Bank, Federation Party, and SODELPA even lay people could see and were shouting of the economic dangers. Forced by world trends in particular neighbouring and big trading partners, the honourable Minister for Economy has come to his senses the realisation that his time is near. This is proof of Fiji's economy and future is not in good hands it is in irresponsible hands. The honourable Minister for Economy talked about five fundamental pillars on modernity, I will just touch on two (2), strengthening law and order, and protecting our natural environment.

Strengthening Law and Order, how can you mention this when one murder has no justice prevails. Families for CRWs are still crying today. How dare you have the gall to say that? Someone gives orders for killing and even take laws into his own hands. How can one be talking about law and order when the regime he leads and stands for broke the law by the use of guns to oust a fairly and properly elected government? Protecting our natural environment, when turning a blind eye to the Malolo devastations to natural resources and not taking to task individual culprits involved within Free Souls.

I believe these individuals have leads or are connected or associated to FijiFirst Party leaders must be well-known to the two. That is a sign of corruption and/or nepotism the very issues FijiFirst Party or Bainimarama alleged and ousted SDL Government in 2006.

Economic areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is sad to see that emphasis of National Budget is not on economic areas but more on consumption, social, security and administration areas, thus the more expenditures there are more imports than exports, more debt and more poverty.

Based on the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, Mr. Speaker, Sir, population living below basic needs poverty line during the period 2013-2014, total number is 240,055, 28 percent of total population of 845,652. However, there is another 21.6 percent are on the margin; this is almost 50 percent are poor. Most of these poor live in the rural areas. We need to be pouring a lot funding, expertise and associated efforts in encouraging private sector participation to the rural areas in particular economic areas or sector in land, forest, fisheries, minerals, trade, tourism and infrastructure developments.

Yet over the years apart from increasing tourism and a flat fisheries, cane production is a failure. Gold, timber and agriculture declined and keep declining. There is a great need to pour in funds and assistance to these economic areas to develop more resources, create employment, increase output performance from these areas, increase exports and reduce poverty in rural areas.

I am saddened by FijiFirst Party Khaiyum, Bainimarama-led Government in not supporting a motion I proposed last sitting to shift emphasis and support resource owners from a subsistence level of

farming to commercial farming. People now know of your negative attitude towards them, the resource owners and rural dwellers.

I now wish to touch on land and mineral resources. Infrastructure and Land Development; these two need to be developed hand in hand. We need roads to open up land for development, production and proper roads at that to further increase production. Power or energy is required either through solar or hydro or fuel to process farm products at identified central production of rural growth centre areas.

A major motorway will need to be constructed from Nadi-Lautoka to Suva-Nausori with exits to Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki, Sigatoka, Navua and Korovou. This would open up many unused lands and resources thereon for more economic uses and benefits.

In Vanua Levu across the island at Matasawalevu/Dreketi to Nadua/Wainunu and Kubulau, Naua/Drawa to Navonu/Keka, Nukubolu to Waiqele Airport, Vaturova-Balawaviriki to Seavaci, et cetera. In maritime island roads on big islands. This is where the funding should be focussing on.

For these reasons more funds should have been allocated to the economic sector - Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Agriculture, Lands Department, Forestry and Fisheries for they are developmental conduits to economic activities and thus benefits.

Reversion of crown land for Schedule A and B \$300,000 allocated to that. What is the status of this program now? I thought this had been done long time ago?

In valuation, I think you need education of the public by monthly or three monthly publications of values in identified sample areas. In order to let the public aware of range of values to sell or buy. Many have been hoodwinked here and robbed daylight at prices well above and also well below market price.

Land Buy Back, only \$5,000 allocated to this. Where is the \$500,000 or half a million been allocated all the years? There seems to be no more Buy-Back Schemes. Fiji first Party Khaiyum-Bainimarama-led Government does not encourage. No itaukei first nation of this country to buy back their land particularly when the freehold owners want to sell and leave and or go into other business life.

Survey of mahogany plantations, allocation of \$512,000. This is important but it is too slow. We need more surveyors who actually review laws or to allow for GPS boundaries for rural large areas.

With capital grants and transfer payments on iTaukei Land Development from \$10 million reduced to \$2 million. Why has this been reduced?

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Very little takers or too much stringent criteria, I do not know! This is another case of not supporting development of *iTaukei* land by the Khaiyum-Bainimarama-led Government.

Sir, on arrears revenue, the Director of Lands need to collect that. Rather than just shouting here, get the \$29 million, what are you doing about it? Is the process working? How effective is it? Surveyors also need to ensure that survey designs and leases are not issued over one another. There are many examples.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, referring to Government's Equity Investment Performance, State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) performance was less than 2017, which includes Fiji Pine Limited. I wish to elaborate on that. Yes, that is correct, 99.8 percent Government shares, but it needs to be properly explained to clear issues here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through a share capital structure approved by Fiji Pine Limited Board in 1991 and 1992 to ensure reversion or transfer of Fiji Pine Limited to resource-owners to redeem ownership of the pine industry in Fiji, shares were or should be as follows – Classes A, B and C.

Class A for Fiji Pine Trust or the resource owners, 0.2 percent or \$100,000, with voting rights and dividend rights. Class B shares - 0.2 percent, also valued at \$100,000.00 for the Government of Fiji, with only voting rights and chairmanship. Class C shares - 99.6 percent for the Government of Fiji with \$69 million as the cost of establishment of plantations in Fiji. There is no voting right nor dividend right. Those are redeemable shares. Bua Pine Plantation was only profitable for Fiji Pine Limited when Bua Pine Plantation came on board in 2007.

Fiji Pine Trust to redeem Class C shares from profits. Fiji Pine Trust to redeem 50 percent on Class C by 2016. That was the capital setup and by 2016, only 0.2 percent non-redeemable \$100,000 worth to remain with Government. With Class C, only 49.8 percent by 2016 and also the plan was that the resource owners take over the management by that time.

By 2025, Fiji Pine Trust to redeem and hold 99.8 percent and also the chairmanship, and the Government to hold 0.2 percent to remain and continue to guide. Class C would have been ceased by that time.

By progress, Bua Pine Plantations commenced harvesting by 2007. Through Annual Reports, we have our hands on whereby in 2009 when Fiji Pine Limited profited \$11 million, 2013 - \$20 million and in 2014 - \$24 million. When you total that, it amounts to \$55 million.

We have also been informed that Fiji Pine Limited (Government) had paid over the last three years (2016, 2017 and 2018) \$9 million and in 2018 which was election year- \$7 million, as commission to landowners. Where did the word 'commission' come from when it should have been dividends? Where is the balance of \$46 million? Where is it?

If that had been paid to redeem shares, fine, but no one knows! Where? The resource-owners are in the dark here. That is exactly why I wanted an inquiry, through a petition, in this House into the pine and mahogany industry to clear all these issues. But the door had been closed, we need clarity. Where is the transparency? Why are you keep suppressing the resource-owners? What about the other years from 2007 to 2018?

Taking away two years - 2007 and 2008, the initial entry preparatory years for Bua Pine, we remained with another seven years. Profits for these years are not known to us. Assuming a conservative estimate of \$20 million profit a year, would total \$140 million. Where is that?

Therefore, a total of \$195 million (\$55 million plus \$140 million) should have been with Fiji Pine Trust (resource-owners) now, less \$69 million plantation cost overall. Plantation establishment costs to Government, if paid in full by now, a balance of \$125 million should now remain with Fiji Pine Trust. Where is that money? They have only been paid \$9 million, but where is \$116 million?

The Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a continuation of the suppression of the resource-owners in this country, no use to us. The emphasis is away from where we are, away from rural areas, from agriculture, forestry, away from fisheries, mining, and away from resource owners. Of course, there are

minor funding here and there but overall it is a disgrace to the resource-owners and the poor of this country.

On the Mahogany Industry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Party (Khaiyum-Bainimarama-led Government) through the Mahogany Industry Decree or Act had taken away the resource owners' 10 percent shareholding in the industry in Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL), now a wholly Government Commercial Company (GCC) 100 percent owned.

After proper consultation with the resource owners, the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) Government enacted the Mahogany Act 2003 and recognised their wishes, and the 10 percent share was the spirit in which to develop the industry, yet thrown away by the Khaiyum-Bainimarama regime.

Secondly, the Decree takes away the regulatory role of the Ministry of Forests with regards to monitoring and enforcing of the Logging Code to protect the environment ecosystem from further massive degradation. How can the FHCL be the operator and regulator at the same time? Something is fishy here!

Why was Sustainable Mahogany Industry (SMI) given freehand in the supply of Grades 1 and 2 logs? Why was the majority of Grade 3 logs given to another foreign investor? Where are they now? They must have dumped Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum and ran away overseas. Why was only the lower Grades 3 and 4 given to resource owners?

However, we are thankful now that the licence of Grade 1 to Grade 5 have been issued to the Fiji Mahogany Trust on behalf of the resource owners. But the whole FHCL Board, management and operations are taking them far away from the landowners, not even opportunities for new and full participation, and reversal of ownership in the industry. There is no plan to that effect.

A legal case which one Atunaisa Tiva of Naboutini, Serua, won squarely in court for reversion of land with mahogany, all was forcefully rescinded by the Khaiyum-Bainimarama-led Government. That is how low this Government can treat resource-owners, forcefully taking away their legal rights, illegally.

This Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by not focusing on economic sector, is furthering away the rights of resource-owners here in Fiji. When is this going to stop?

The Decree or Act is so cruel that it does not allow resource-owners to take issues up legally for determination by an independent court, commission or arbitration. There is no legal redress.

The Court Registrar is empowered under the Decree or Act to throw such legal issues into the rubbish tin. That is exactly where the rights of the resource owners end up or are now in. How can that be? All of you who are out there are condoning this to happen and continue to allow this to happen to the rights of the owners in this country. You are to blame, you will be blamed, mark my words!

The log sales proceeds promised under the Mahogany Decree or Act to be paid to Mahogany Trust for distribution to the resource and landowners had not been paid to date. And as I understand it, FHCL had dealt with the branding and research of forest developments but is yet to complete payment of Government-guaranteed debt, a debt amounting to some \$26 million and had paid off about \$20 million with \$6 million to be paid off this year, hopefully. This debt was a sole decision by the Government over the years. Resource owners had never been a part of these decisions. It had never been a part of the FHCL Board. That is how cruel this Government is, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I want to conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to say five sentences. The The FijiFirst Party (Khaiyum-Bainimarama) Government:

1. Is lining the pockets of the rich;
2. Does not care about the poor;
3. Is wasting hard-earned money;
4. Is not credible; and
5. Is irresponsible, not fit to govern.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

I thank the Honourable Bulanauca for your statement. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, the Honourable Selai Adimaitoga.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Members of this august Parliament, ladies and gentlemen present in the public gallery; *ni sa bula vinaka* and a good afternoon to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this afternoon to make a response in support of the 2019-2020 Budget. I wish to state that this Budget is a responsible budget. More significantly, it keeps the people of this nation at heart.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition took to social media to tell us to stop talking about the past. Should we start going to job interviews and tell an employer not to take into account our experience? When your history and your track record is one of failures, it is a warning to all people of what you are capable of and what you bring to the table, and these must never be forgotten. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition loves to bring up his past when it comes to rugby or meeting the Queen, but heaven forbid, if someone mentions his failure, all of a sudden the past is bad.

In his speech earlier, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said something that really made an impression on me. He warned the Honourable Prime Minister that the Honourable Attorney-General is a political liability. He also stated that as usual referring to ethnicity and race. This is not the sign of a true leader of the 21st century in Fiji. Not a true leader for our country where 50 percent of the population is below the age of 27. This is a weak and pathetic attempt to cause division within FijiFirst that will never work because we are strong as a team.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know the problems he is already facing with the division within SODELPA, and yet has the nerve to look to this side of the floor. What a joke!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Since the Honourable Leader of the Opposition likes to quote the Bible, let me remind him that the devil is known as the great divider. This method is used by Satan; before he quotes the *Bible*, I would like to urge him to look at Matthew 7:3 which says, and I quote:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

Ministry of iTaukei Affairs Budget: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the allocation of \$15.4 million made to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, of which \$14.7 million is for Operating Expenditure and \$0.5 million for Capital Expenditure. Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that this allocation will help fulfil the objectives that the Ministry has planned.

More importantly, in accordance to the principles of the Public Service Reforms, this has motivated the Ministry to work smarter by critically planning and proactively approaching partners to ensure that the Ministry remains aligned to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs 2018-2022 objectives set out in its Strategic Development Plan.

Society is a family, so too, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the cultural setting it refers to the *Tokatoka*, *Mataqali*, *Yavusa* and *Vanua*. For this reason, we have not deviated from our stakeholders, but more importantly we are becoming more articulate and strategic in our approach, which is in accordance to our mandate in overseeing the welfare and the good governance of the *iTaukei*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our strategic priorities are related to inspiring good governance within *iTaukei* institutions and promoting political, economic and social cultural development. The objective of these activities is to reinforce community responsibilities and obligations to provide capacity building initiatives that will inspire changing mindsets and revive the principles of *solesolevaki*, to name a few. Thus, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs allocation will allow us that freedom.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 1,171 Villages, 189 Districts and 14 Provinces. The number of villagers, number of houses, the needs and the issues faced in addition to the environment and the landmass area of responsibility differ greatly within the Provinces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to commend the Budget for operational stipend for the Provincial Councils. Previous allocations for the iTaukei Affairs Board was focused on the remuneration for the staff and the allowances for the Turaga ni Koro and the Mata ni Tikina. With additional funds, the Board is able to provide for communities. This assistance is timely and will greatly assist in the collation and validation of village profiles, which will greatly assist in the drawing up of viable Village Development Plans for the community. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this lays the foundation for the development of resilient *iTaukei* Communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also comment on the increase of monthly allowance. These individuals play a major role and are an extension of the Government's arm within the communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the role of the Turaga ni Koro in the subsidiary legislation of iTaukei Affairs Act 1944 - section 28, on the Tikina and Village Council, has expanded to the extent that they are assisting Border Control with reporting with regards to yachts that are docking in the maritime islands. We have also received interest from Fiji Roads Authority for their appointment as Road Marshals, and I foresee that as we continue to develop, their roles will continue to evolve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps, at this juncture it is fitting that I raise a concern on the need of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), when implementing their programmes within the communities to please, liaise with the Provincial Council Office. The Provincial Council will liaise and make arrangements, including facilitate the traditional protocols to ensure that you have a maximum participation in your programmes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must continue to have respect for the communities and acknowledge that they have rights too, within their space.

Cultural Safeguards - Tabua Shop, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to commend this Budget in supporting initiatives to protect and safeguard the *iTaukei* culture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to

acknowledge the 2019-2020 Budget of \$50,000 allocated to the Tabua Shop for the next financial year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the assistance of the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment and the assistance to other agencies, the establishment of a tracking system and necessary processes in relation to a Tabua Moratorium will be addressed.

Vola ni Kawa Bula, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also commend the FijiFirst Government for the consistent support for the Vola ni Kawa Bula digitisation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would please this Parliament to note that the objective of this digitisation is to meditate most up-to-date records and ensure that the equal distribution of land lease monies are carried out efficiently. It also ensures that the records are in sync with the Births, Deaths and Marriages records.

Leadership, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if one were to thoroughly assess the allocation for the Ministry, one will note that there are two allocations for traditional leadership, and I wish to draw the attention of this august body on the comments that were made at the onset. In acknowledgement of the emerging issues of climate change, change in socio-economic circumstances, family values, financial literacy as such, a curriculum was developed to assist traditional leaders to handle these issues and how to evolve, and how they assume their role as traditional leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other programme overseen by the iTaukei Lands Commission is a proactive strategy focused on addressing conflicts prior to it escalating to be heard by the Commission on this approach. Each position within the *iTaukei* social structure of *bete*, *sauturaga* and *gonedau*, to name a few, are reminded of their obligations and responsibilities towards the common good. The operative word, Mr. Speaker, Sir, being the “common good”. The onus is on each of us in this august Parliament to ensure that common good supersedes all else.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Woodrow Wilson said it best and I quote, “There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed.” Honourable Speaker, Sir, I fully support the Budget that is before this august Parliament. *Vinaka vakalevu*. May God bless us all.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs for her statement, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. *Bula vinaka*. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this 2019-2020 Budget is best described in the *iTaukei* proverb, “*I bulubulu boro vulavula*” which in English means, “the budget is similar to a grave painted white where outside is nicely painted and colourful and lively but inside there is a nice coffin with all its contents rotting anyway.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after hearing the Honourable Prime Minister’s speech this morning, he sounded weak, lost and defeated. People will know that the honourable Prime Minister read out his script that was prepared by someone else.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, people will judge the difference between two former Commanders, former Prime Minister and Prime Minister, people will judge, our leader delivered with professionalism and the leader of the other side of the House was more like an amateur.

The 2019-2020 Budget is the worst budget that has ever been produced by any Government since Independence. This Budget is full of smoke and mirrors, it is by name a deceptive Budget by a confused FijiFirst Government. They are suffering from what we call “strategic paralysis”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the nation was expecting something better after their level 9 low-lying strategic meeting at Suvavou House but here, we are given a budget where VAT continues to increase, low investment due to low confidence in the country and the economy and lack of resources given to

productive resource-based sectors and where Government service delivery will be further constrained by the cut in various Ministries' allocations; we will see more poor, incomplete and delayed service delivery.

People are asking why the Budget has been reduced by \$809 million, compared to the 2018-2019 Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir? People are saying at grassroots level and I quote, "no money, *paisa nahi hai, sa sega nai lavo*". That is what other people are saying when they saw the reduction.

The Honourable Minister for Economy tried hard in his Budget Address to convince the nation that the reduction by \$809 million was due to Government's overarching fiscal consolidation strategy; no one believed that.

On pages 29 and 30 of the 2019-2020 Budget Supplement it states that the rehabilitation required for *TC Winston* in 2016 and *TC Keni* and *TC Josie* in 2017-2018 caused the overspending and resulted in the high fiscal deficit of 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 fiscal years. Why blame *TC Winston* in 2016 and *TC Keni* and *TC Josie* now when in fact the increase in the budget in those years was very likely from election gains?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- See their reactions!

FijiFirst introduced various grants, for example, Farm Care Grant, Home Care Grant, Transport Care, Leaseholder Care, Sugar Cane Care, Welfare Care in 2018 with a total spending of \$123 million assisting 100,000 Fijian families not only as a relief but to appease the people to get votes in the 2018 General Elections - that is a fact.

I agree with the honourable Leader of the Opposition this morning when he said that chickens have come home to roost, and you have no choice but now to control Government expenditure because in 2018 you were desperate to win the elections and you spent taxpayers' money recklessly. Reckless spending was the real reason for the Budget reduction this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, where is the *TC Winston* Rehabilitation Performance Audit on millions spent and we need to find out which businesses really benefitted from what the people at grassroots level call a scam. People still have not rebuilt their homes, children are still in tent classrooms.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Go to Taveuni, go to Qamea Island they are.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- (Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- You are disconnected.

They are card recipients, a lot of them are still awaiting the delivery of materials. What went wrong, Honourable Minister for Economy? What went wrong? Government is lining the pockets of the rich and the poor is getting poorer.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Performance Audit is required in the various Care Schemes, Home Care Schemes and Farm Care Schemes, e-Transport Schemes, et cetera, because businesses have laughed all the way to the bank, but the poor remain in poverty.

To talk about expenditure consolidation, now it is unbelievable, Honourable Minister. This is not a deliberate attempt to consolidate expenditure but it is a desperate attempt by the FijiFirst Government after realising, Sir that they have a lower revenue forecast than expected. This is simply irresponsible economics and financial management, Mr. Speaker, Sir. No one believes that lie anymore. People are laughing as to why the sudden change of stunts by reduction in revenue inflows and Government expenditure to control in this Budget, to be kept within limits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people deserve to be told the truth by the Honourable Minister for Economy that the expenditure was driving revenue rather than revenue driving expenditure. The Government has not been achieving its revenue targets in the past fiscal years.

In 2016-2017, the Budget estimated revenue was \$3.1 billion, and actual revenue collected was only \$2.8 billion. In the 2017-2018, the Budget estimated revenue was at \$3.8 billion and Government only collected \$3.2 billion. This shows the disconnect from reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2018-2019 Estimated Revenue was \$4.2 billion and Government only collected \$3.2 billion.

In the 2019-2020 Estimated Revenue (the one we have now) is at \$3.4 billion and next year when the actual figures come, we will see in the next budget. But the point is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the people of this nation need to know the Honourable Minister for Economy and the FijiFirst Government had been inflating figures to show the economy is well by selling the past few years what they had branded as the “mother of all budgets.” They also had a Budget theme in their first Budget, I remember, “*Turning Promises into Deeds*”, that it turned around to turning promises into debts.

We have heard from the other side in the last few years the rhetoric’s like “unprecedented budget, “no previous government has done this”, “only the FijiFirst Government has done this”; all the boastful comments like, economic growth more than ever before and now the “Bainimarama Boom”. This is all nonsense, Mr. Speaker, Sir and window-dressing tactics by the Honourable Minister for Economy; why slow down the economy with less stimulation on Government revenue?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after reading the *Fiji Sun* headlined last Friday, “Budget Praise”, the ANZ economist thanked the Government for reducing its expenditure to try bring down debt as a share of GDP. That is what the Opposition had been saying in the last four years. It is good that the Honourable Minister for Economy has come back to his senses to understand the reality. The FijiFirst Government cannot fake it any more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, seriously, the FijiFirst Government should now find an economist on the other side of the House to take over from the Honourable Attorney-General for 13 years of excessive low quality spending that has placed our country’s financial position in a precarious situation.

Fiji is in kaboom and doom under the FijiFirst hands. We cannot say much, given that the FijiFirst Leader in the radio interview pre-elections with the Leader of SODELPA could not explain what is GDP? *Na cava na GDP?* The FijiFirst Leader was simply lost and said, “*Na GDP na dinau.*” With that kind of answer, we immediately know that Fiji is kaboom in a Bainimarama doom and gloom; *kaya mada ni’u lasu.* Then the famous line came up, *e vinaka mo dina.* The people of Fiji deserve to be told the truth, nothing else. FijiFirst is unfit to govern and this Budget must therefore be defeated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in September 2016, I said in this august House, “If pigs could vote, they will always vote for the person who brings the food, even though he is the same person who is going to slaughter and eat them later.” People who voted them in 2018, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are now regretting their votes because their true colour is now fully shown. There is a big problem. When you look at the various Government programmes like, e-ticketing, people cannot use their left over balances and this is one of the biggest robberies done by this Government.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Check the law.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- None from the other side of the House travel by bus or taxi and they do not really know these problems the people are facing. Licence fees hurts the poor in this country, to open up a canteen and the various fees that you have to pay, the various classes of licences; very expensive. With the grass root level, even fishing licence, boat licence and all the kinds of fees that our ordinary people have to pay, Honourable Speaker, given the treatment done by this FijiFirst Government.

Land as a factor of production, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and in today’s *Fiji Times* states that 300 landowners share only \$300.70 cents a year in Bua,” and this is the kind of rate the FijiFirst Government is giving. We have been calling out for a rental review for iTLTB to review rent and for Fiji Pine to review those rates but fell on deaf ears.

If you look at Head 50 of the Budget Estimates last year, the iTaukei Land Development Grant was at \$12 million, and this year, it has dropped down to \$2 million. I do not know where we are heading to. We thought that there will be plenty landowner-participation but the drop in allocations show something else, that they do not care for the *iTaukei* landowners, which is the bottom line.

If you look at the CBUL allocation under the Ministry of Agriculture last year, it was \$7.79 million, this year, it is only \$6.9 million - a drop again. They do not care about the economic status of our landowners, who want financial support to set up their Small Micro Enterprise. See the reactions?

(Hon. Government Member interjected)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The reactions coming from the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is a common style that our children who are internet users, after hearing the reactions from the other side, the children nowadays in schools will say, “Paakh.”

(Laughter)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The *dalo* and *yaqona* grant allocation, under the Ministry of Agriculture, has dropped, where is your focus on the non-sugar agriculture crops? I think this is where our grassroots people need more money to be spent.

On ECAL and on the \$0.50 cents plastic bag, it came from \$0.10 cents to \$0.20 cents and went on to \$0.50 cents. I think this is a big punishment to the poor of this country, and they are calling for the removal of the 9 percent VAT.

They have said in their FijiFirst Manifesto 2014 that there will be zero-VAT, but 9 percent VAT, people are calling that to be removed.

Basic food items are high, the cost of living is high and the various problems that the citizens of Fiji are facing.

LTA fines: wide restrictions affecting not only cane trucks but also pine cutting in Vanua Levu, Mr. Speaker, Sir. \$1,000 for a fine for access of one tonne where a lorry owner will get only get only \$168 at the Wairiki Bridge if you see the weighbridge voucher, that is a big punishment for the citizens of this country.

Poor Government service delivery: I do not need to talk about that, we all know and the people all know that. Road conditions, traffic, and the need for a RAMM Report on repairs of every money spent on chainage by Fiji Roads Authority (FRA).

High consultation fees: We should stop getting people from overseas when our locals are left out.

My friend, Sukha Singh, from Labasa rightly said in the *Fiji Sun* last week, in his letter to the Editor, "I don't believe the stomping of milk packets stopped the entire urban school benefiting from the Free Milk Programme." See that question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a poor reasoning for limiting free milk to urban students.

Road conditions: The Honourable Rohit Sharma knows as he uses the road in the Labasa town area but the road that comes down to his place in Savusavu Street is in a very poor condition, and even his dad has told me to bring it up in Parliament.

Failures of electricity and water projects: Most of these water projects are affected by the laying out of project purpose and people in Buavou, Seaqaqa, are still waiting for those projects to be done.

There is a drop in NDP, SME Grant and more foreign investors are slowly crowding out our local business in various industries, for example, Xinfra, the ply board factory in Malawai, Dreketi has opened up, that could have been given to a local company in Labasa. Why close down Malau when you want to give that licence to Xinfra, a foreign company?

There is drop in allocation and repair maintenance for Government schools, Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS), Queen Victoria School (QVS) and Adi Cakobau School (ACS). I had emailed once to the honourable Minister for Education on the condition of the ACS Hostel but she has not responded till now. I can show you the email, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Status of the Northern Economy: There is no port, Government has not provided any subsidy, closed-off Malau Mill, lack of jobs, Valebasoga Mill has lost half of its employees. Now we hear FSC soon will make redundant 10 percent of its workers, wearing bridges in the Northern Division, no development in the textile industry in the Northern Division, the cost of getting machines by Northern business people is very high and the cost of transporting those production to the market from the North to Viti Levu is quite high and the various fees they have to pay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the whole picture of this FijiFirst Government. They have lost the plot. They are confused because their leader too is very confused.

Also, I call upon the Government to look into the mobile network area in Niurua, Raviravi, Naividamu, Nakalou and the Honourable Minister for Defence knows that area, he farms in that area but the problem with that area, they are still not hooked up to communication or mobile networking.

Now, I turn to my shadow portfolio. For the Fiji Police, we do not see any specific allocation for human resource data management and allocation on the Job Evaluation Exercise payout job that we debated in the last sitting. We do not see any allocation for the reallocation of the Fiji Police Force Headquarters as was recommended by the Standing Committee in the last Sitting.

For the RFMF, I call upon the RFMF to table their Annual Report. The Commander of the RFMF on FBC News on 12th June, I will put it correctly by saying:

“RFMF infrastructure is so old and over the years, what we have doing, we have been asking for money to allow us to repair and refurbish the quarters and the office spaces we have. It is that area that has been reduced a little bit, slow down and hopefully we can pick it up again next year if the economy is well up again.”

Even the Commander knows that the economy is not well.”

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very irresponsible Budget, not a future looking Budget, nor a pro-growth Budget, as labelled by the Minister of Trade. This Budget only looks after the rich, makes the poor poorer, not credible, and it shows that this Government is unfit to govern.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot support the motion because it reflects irresponsible leadership. True love, as you know, must be seen in the Budget and no one must be left behind. This Budget has not cared about Fijians, buy has left many Fijians behind, and I call upon the Honourable Prime Minister, in conclusion, to immediately remove the Minister for Economy and choose another Minister on the other side, given his track record. You should give it to the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy because he has been manipulating figures and misleading the people of Fiji in this House. I think he is a better Minister for Economy.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore, this Budget must be defeated. I thank you for your indulgence.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu for your statement. I now give the floor to the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, the Honourable Minister Rosy Akbar to have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet colleagues and Members of the august House: I rise to support the 2019-2020 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government, since its election in 2014, has remained steadfast in its commitment to the education sector. We have signalled that education is the key to unlock the economic potential of Fiji. A well-educated society is a society at peace with itself, which competes with the best in the world and which encourages and supports all parts of the society to aim high and achieve our dreams.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji will continue to grow and improve education, developing quality education, as this is what this Government is committed to do. We have said that staying the course, being consistent, are key elements of this Government’s achievements and our agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, much has been said by our media and our financial analysts about the reduction in our Budget. This does not look further than the numbers into the outcomes, impacts and achievements. It does not also address the need for us to consolidate this significant growth that we have experienced in the education sector and the opportunities presented to find new and more efficient ways of delivering quality education, improving service delivery without increasing costs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has allocated to the Ministry an average of 12 percent of the National Budget from 2012 till now. Like the economy, the Ministry's budget has grown over that period from \$257 million in 2012 to the proposed \$467 million for the 2019-2020 financial year. This is indeed consistent.

In 2014, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we saw the introduction of free education and associated initiatives. This led to an increase in the Ministry's budget of just over \$101 million. That is vision and our commitment to invest in our nation's future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are focused on the outcomes and not just the numbers. Sir, allow me to outline some of the outcomes of our investment:

- From 2014, we have had a year on year average increase in the enrolment of girls at the rate of 3 percent each year - a staggering increase of 16 percent over the last six years;
- Formalising our commitment to early childhood care and education has seen an increase in the number of students enrolled from 1,000 to over 19,000;
- By opening the doors to education, we have seen a continuous increase of 1 percent annually in primary and secondary school enrolments - of course, this is good news for the future of our economy and country.
- Our students with special education needs have also taken advantage of opening up education with an increase of 87 percent of the last five years.
- Our teacher numbers have also increased over the same period by 30 percent to 13,589 to date. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been continuous growth in the investment that this Government has made in the higher education sector. Here too, this Government has opened the doors to higher education wide for all Fijians regardless of their economic status. The consolidation of scholarships and loans under the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board (TSLB) has led to significant changes in our ability to build a smarter Fiji. Again Mr. Speaker, Sir, the impact has been incredible;
- In 2014, we assisted 5,940 students; in 2019 we are assisting 25,471 students; an increase of 328 percent;
- This has been achieved through a cumulative budget allocation from 2014 to now of 713 million; a real kick start to our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the real challenge in the education sector budget, including the Ministry, TSLB and Higher Education is shown in an increase to \$1 billion in this current financial year from a base of \$321 million in 2012.

In line with the Incheon Declaration of 2015, we have met the aspiration goal of at least 4 to 6 percent of GDP and or at least 15 to 20 percent of total public expenditure to education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2012, our budget for the education sector was 15 percent of our public expenditure. In this current financial year, it is 22 percent and the next financial year, it will be 21 percent. We have exceeded the goal within four years and that is indeed an achievement that this House should celebrate.

So, yes, Mr. Speaker, our budget requires us to be more creative, to seek our greater efficiencies and to root out wastage. However, we will also complete the rehabilitation work necessitated as a result of *TC Winston* and this budget is therefore no longer required.

Similarly, with the transfer of Technical College of Fiji to the Fiji National University; the budget for the technical colleges is no longer required.

In the Ministry and the TSLB in particular, we are moving to greater automation. We are working with a technologically literate generation going to higher education and so online applications and communications do make sense.

Within the Ministry, with a workforce of now 14,000, we need to get smart and use technology to manage our operations.

We are contributing significantly, Mr. Speaker, to the development of the human resources management information system together with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. This, of course, will be rolled out across all ministries contributing to greater actions across the board.

The Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy focused on the issues of fraud in his Budget Address. It is a sad state of affairs when we have to develop new initiative with that underlined requirement to address fraud from the start.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have students as young as five years old in our bus stations selling the e-ticket for as little as \$5.00, regardless of the amount of money still on the card.

An elder sibling, Mr. Speaker, will borrow his or her younger sibling's e-ticket to go to university when he or she already has his chance for the assistance from TSLB or is not entitled to such assistance. The LTA has found several instances of this happening. It is a sad indictment that LTA has to now employ an additional hundred Enforcement Officers due to the level of fraud on our transport system. Students encouraged by their parents will tap their e-ticket card twice, one for the student and one for the parent to get a subsidised trip.

As parents, we all need to take responsibility for what we teach our children. Values and values education should and must begin at home. So, does it matter that one tap worth \$4 is perhaps deemed to be unimportant? That one tap becomes five taps in a week worth \$20 or \$80 in a month. If we get away with it once, we will try again and it can become \$840 in an academic year for one parent.

Mr. Speaker, due to the disregard for something which is given for free, when it is actually at the cost of taxpayers, the Ministry and Vodafone deal with 1,000 e-tickets being lost a week or 42,000 tickets in an academic year being lost. The total number of students benefitting from the transport assistance is well over 100,000, yet we have to replace 42,000 e-tickets a year. The policy of free replacements was changed last year to one replacement at no cost and after that the parents have to pay \$5. How much time and money does this waste replacing 1,000 e-tickets a week?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are investigating ways in which we can tighten up the transport assistance system further in consultation with the Land Transport Authority (LTA), the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), the Fiji Bus Operators Association, Vodafone, Department of Information, and the Office of the Attorney-General. Of course, our Ministry will be making announcements to this effect in due course. I would also like to acknowledge the financial contributions made by the Fiji Bus Operators Association and Vodafone to the transport assistance programme, which has made a significant difference in the lives of our students and their families.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has invested in what has become now known as Free Education Grant (FEG). This is an amount of money per student allocated to a school to use, 30 percent of that is for administration and operations, 20 percent for building and compound maintenance, 15 percent for Information Technology (IT) and computers, 10 percent for library, 10 percent for Physical Education, Music, Arts and Craft (PEMAC) and science equipment, and 15 percent for stationery.

The amounts vary between primary, secondary and vocational schools. It aims to achieve the economies of scale in larger schools. This is largely managed by the school management committee and the head of the school. The Ministry undertakes unannounced audits to ensure that there is compliance to the school management handbook.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently we have centralised the Free Education Grant of 34 schools and have recently decentralised 50. It is sad that we have to do this due to maladministration by school managements, sometimes aided and abetted by the school heads.

We are all obliged to maintain fiscal discipline and accountability for public funds. Such funding must be used in the best interest of the school, yet when we visit schools, we see the compounds in a poor state, the buildings in need of a lot of tender love and care, schools without computers or without sufficient library books.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recent inductive research we have identified schools which have retained amounts of the Free Education Grant from one year to the next. This can be anything from \$58,000 to a few dollars in one year. The Ministry will be considering a policy to address this as it presents a challenge, should schools fully expend the Free Education Grant in the year in which it is allocated?

This is the responsible thing to do in order to make sure that all critical areas of school operations are funded. It implies that some schools are cutting back on expenditure in some areas to fund others. So, does this mean that they can do without funding in these areas or should the Ministry allow this to continue but through an approval process?

I will be discussing with my Ministry this new policy to ensure that funding is fully used in a transparent and accountable way as per the allocations, or is returned to the Ministry of Economy or at the first payment of the FEG, is reduced by the amount of savings accrued. This is the responsible way to operate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and perhaps we will be able to introduce incentives for schools that do more with less. Grants need to be used prudently for the benefit of the students.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also delighted to inform the House that there are moves to revive the School Managers Association, and I look forward to engaging with the leadership to address areas of common interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a few new initiatives which have been included in our Budget, as our intention is to consolidate and build for the future. These new initiatives are aimed to build on the values, we as Fijians hold dear.

With support from the Climate Change Unit in the Ministry of Economy, we will work to augment the Climate Change curriculum which runs from upper primary into secondary. We want, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that the lead Fiji has given the world through Conference of Parties (COP) 23 is continued in the leadership which show in Climate Change in our classrooms.

Also included, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the confidence-building in public speaking. Those of us in this august Parliament know how important this is. We need to provide opportunities to our Year 12 and

Year 13 students to get the exposure to public speaking which will stamp them in good stead in the next chapter of their lives in higher education or the world of work.

Speaking in front of your school mate is a very difficult proposition from speaking to people you do not know. It requires not only confidence but practice and research. We will work with relevant organisations on a pilot this financial year and link it to other programmes we run in partnership, for example, with Leadership Fiji, FBC and Film Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, we also know the importance of food security. I think back and remember how we used to get involved in school gardens and this led us to continuing the same practices at home. I welcome the opportunity for cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture on this project as we will work to instil a sense of self-reliance in our students that they can grow useful crops.

The competition rules will help to promote team work, creative thinking and promote entrepreneurship and focus on food security, and to develop a cultural of growing Fijian produce and enterprise. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to see our students selling their produce at the market and ploughing the profit back into the school.

We want to see students assessing the value of produce which they put on the table in their boarding schools and selling any excess for the benefit of the school. We want to see students planting flowers and vegetables at home and then selling them to earn an income for themselves or put into savings for the inevitable rainy days. This is not just about a school competition Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is about lifelong learning, ensuring a healthy diet and of course an avenue for making an income.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also hope that students will learn about what plants grow best in what climate, different types of soil that require irrigation, those that can provide two or three harvests in a year, those which should grow in shade or sun and those which require pruning. Above all, we want our children or students to learn about organic farming. I am sure my honourable colleague will promote that also through the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have addressed the damage wreaked by *TC Winston*, *TC Keni*, *TC Josie* and *TC Gita*, with 15 schools yet to be completed by the year 2019. As I have said before, this has been a major undertaking with the construction of 400 new buildings, and more than 950 existing buildings being upgraded. This construction work has added value to the private sector and to the economy and Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will have to build back better.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to clarify on the statement made by honourable Bulitavu that we still have children studying in tents. I can assure the House that to date, since the beginning of the school year, we have no child studying under a tent anywhere across the country. It is a blatant lie. The intent behind that statement from honourable Bulitavu, I am not sure but it is of course perhaps to mislead the people.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has begun on a work of school-wide infrastructure audit, probably the first of its kind audit beginning with our Government schools. And honourable Bulitavu did mention ACS, yes, these are planned projects that do not happen overnight. I can refute the claims by honourable Bulitavu that I did not respond. I did say the team will be meeting to talk about the issues at ACS Hostel.

In the new financial year Mr. Speaker, Sir, greater impetus will be generated with the support of the Ministry of Economy. This will enable us to have a baseline of information on which we can make evidence based decisions on which schools really needs the most assistance from our Government.

In parallel, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we hope to be able to get the necessary expertise to plan where we need new schools. We know the rural-urban drift, and we need to analyse the impact of this. We know that we are creating new housing developments, and this needs to include education and health facilities. With this forward planning we will be able to plan and budget better.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the proposed Budget, we are still to receive substantial funding for schools. This covers:

- Bau Central College;
- Upgrade and maintenance of school facilities;
- Construction of new school facilities; and
- Finishing the rehabilitation works.

This amount of about \$43 million is welcomed, and will be jointly planned and implemented by the Ministry and the Ministry of Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have spoken before on the importance of reviewing our curriculum and to modernise it to equip our students with the skills they need in the global village in which we live. The honourable Attorney-General announced last month that the World Bank will be working with us on this initiative. It will not be an easy task as we will need not only to review the content of the curriculum, but to address infrastructure needs and the up skilling of teachers to deliver the new curriculum. This will need to be well planned and the allocation in the Budget will support this process.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have already started to move to more technology enable learning. We have started to convert our textbooks into e-books. This will enable our students to read at home on their devices or on the computer or in the IT lab in school. As we plan to use greater technology, we will need to address internet connections, hardware and teaching skills in our remote and maritime areas, and we are committed to do this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with our newly installed Council for our National University, I am confident that FNU will rise to new heights. To support this largest grant is augmented by funding for students through TSLTB. The capital grant from Labasa Campus will add to the reach of FNU and support Government's "look north" policy.

Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge the policy changes proposed by the Budget Speech for scholarships and loans. Again, as a result of the ongoing consolidation and review process, we are able to address wastage and ensure a more equitable allocation in funding. The change to "study where you live" will ensure that new students study where there is a programme available in their vicinity as a priority.

The policy to cease funding for programmes which do not generate credits towards a Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor's degree will ensure that we are not wasting money on our students' time, having to do the same course again to get the credits. In the course of 2020, working to ensure that all work through Year 13 will ensure that we remove duplication of services. This is our new way of doing business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has fully opened the doors of education to all Fijians. We continue to ensure we level the playing fields for all our students, leaving no one behind. We have

met the aspiration of an education sector budget equivalent of 21 per cent of public expenditure. We are now being challenged to continue to improve service delivery, and we willingly embrace this challenge with the Budget proposed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this words, I commend the 2019-2020 Budget to Parliament for consideration. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to contribute to the Debate on the 2019-2020 Budget. I wish to drive home five (5) fundamental truths about this Budget, and about the FijiFirst Government:

1. FijiFirst Government is lining the pockets of the rich;
2. FijiFirst Government does not care for the poor;
3. FijiFirst Government is wasting our hard earned money;
4. FijiFirst Government is not credible; and
5. FijiFirst Government is irresponsible.

(Honourable Members interjected).

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- On lining the pockets of the rich, Mr. Speaker, the billion spent on infrastructure has largely enriched the rich. The ideas of consecutive economic growth has been largely driven by the rich.

Mr. Speaker, Government's share of revenue and expenditure relative to the GDP are very high, 36 and 40 per cent, respectively. We just crowd out the medium and small businesses creating space only for the conglomerates.

Mr. Speaker, taxation for the corporates is way too low in Fiji. For private companies, it is 20 per cent, for overseas companies relocating into Fiji is 17 per cent, for the listed companies it is only 10 per cent. And if you take advantage of all the other concessions that are available, a corporate can actually end up paying zero per cent in tax. Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, pay corporate rates that are much higher than Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, this we believe is the reason Fiji was blacklisted by the European Union, because it is a safe haven for the conglomerates. We have to understand the European Union, Mr. Speaker, you will remember the case with Greece. Greece almost collapsed. What they discovered was that the conglomerates in Greece, were given ways to avoid paying tax. And they had to be bailed out by other members of the European Union, who made sure that the conglomerates paid their fair share of tax. That is the reason why Fiji has been blacklisted. We are open to abuse by the conglomerates.

Mr. Speaker, an indication or a glaring example of this was *TC Winston* where the rich got their way with FijiFirst. Quite simply, it was licensed to print money for those companies that were chosen by FijiFirst to supply materials. There are even whispers, Mr. Speaker, that some of those companies have made profits in one year that would normally take them four years to make. Mr. Speaker, I belong to the corporate community and these are things that we hear around the cocktail circuit and the like, and three years after *TC Winston*, victims are still suffering.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we saw the way FijiFirst campaigned in the 2018 Election. We were in awe of how they campaigned, bankrolled by their cronies. But, Mr. Speaker, they lost five seats, we won six, and they lost their majority which was 91,000 in 2014, to only 147 in 2018. So, to the conglomerates listening out there, put your money to the real winner, put your money behind SODELPA.

Mr. Speaker, Government does not care for the poor. Life is hard for the multitudes in Fiji. It has been established that 28 percent live below the poverty line, and up to 48 percent of the populace just barely make it under the poverty line. And that is, Mr. Speaker, almost 50 percent of our people are doing it the hard way.

I have often spoken about the lady who wrote to me one day and said, “Sir, go to the supermarket. Go and see, watch the faces of the people in the supermarket. Look at the level of anxiety written on their faces, the burden they are carrying on how to make ends meet.” The stories of grief, Mr. Speaker, is never ending with our people under the FijiFirst administration that we have today.

And adding salt to injury, Mr. Speaker, there was this consultant who was brought in to consult on the minimum wage. He was making all sorts of confusing and ludicrous statements about the poor population, the minimum wage, the cost of goods, et cetera. We wondered at how FijiFirst could have brought someone like that to make those statements. He made that in the local newspapers.

What we know, Mr. Speaker, and we have known for some time, that FijiFirst is living in another planet other than Fiji. Of course, SODELPA is proposing a \$4 minimum wage, not the \$2.68 that the FijiFirst has been touting to be sufficient for our people.

Mr. Speaker, the poor carries the tax burden in this country. If you look at the Budget, direct tax comes to \$800 million, indirect tax is \$2.2 billion. Already, the people are howling. Soon after the Budget, the price of goods have already gone up in the supermarkets, and that already, Mr. Speaker, is attributed to the indirect tax.

I can say, Mr. Speaker, the way I see things, that no other people on the developing world is squeezed for government revenue the way we do in Fiji. The poor in the villages are even made to pay for licences for the activities they undertake. I mean, that is how desperate we are in squeezing our people to come out with Government revenue.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is wasting our hard earned money. There is too much low priority spending. I brought up the question about Tourism Fiji, which I was part of at one time, advertising the sale of their 50 kva generator, bought in 2015 and the description on the advertisement was this, “Hardly used, well serviced, well maintained.” Why would Tourism Fiji buy a 50 kva generator and then not use it?

I used to be an hotelier and I bought generators for my hotel. I did not see the reason why Tourism Fiji would buy a generator, and I liked the description, “Hardly used”. Hardly used was just about telling me that the brain power on the other side of the aisle is hardly used, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Of course, Honourable Speaker, the \$45 million spent on Natadola for golf, and right the next door on the same peninsula only two kilometres away are the villagers of Vusama, who still do not have running water. And the same can be said for all the villages between

Natadola and Yako, still having huge problems with their water. Having spent \$45 million on golf, and for what? What did you bring to us?

We spent \$18 million to support the marketing of Fiji Airways for a Singapore route. Honourable Speaker, Fiji Airways is a billion dollar company. Why should the taxpayers of Fiji support the marketing of a billion dollar company? Can someone explain that to me?

I am highlighting here, Honourable Speaker, the low priority spending that has been the hallmark of FijiFirst all this while. And today, we hear about a road that was built in Nadi that was built at \$12.5 million per kilometre, and some roads were from \$4 million per kilometre. There appears to be no benchmark on how to spend our hard earned money and it is wasteful and is truism to say that FijiFirst is wasting our hard earned money, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, with the billions spent on infrastructure, there should be no potholes on the road today. Everyone should have clean running water and electricity, the hospitals should be clean and well maintained, but the quality of infrastructure is still very poor at best, and the conclusion is that, huge money spent has been wasted in a manner that is monumental.

The propensity, Honourable Speaker, to hire expatriates with a huge pay and perks, while our people are sidelined within our institutions, they do nothing to grow our people. It is our people to whom our future institutions are dependent. FijiFirst, Honourable Speaker, has been known to say to people and this is true, "If you cannot do it, I will bring someone else to do it." And this is what we see today, we have the expatriates. Whereas SODELPA says, "If you cannot do it, we will train you to do it."

Honourable Speaker, Government is not credible. FijiFirst is trying to convince people that the growth in economy is driven by the private sector, but it is not. It is due to the public spending which cannot go on forever.

Government revenue should be 20 percent of GDP and not 36 percent, and Government expenditure should 20 percent, not 40 percent as you see with FijiFirst today. What we are saying here, Honourable Speaker, is that, Government should leave space for the private sector to take the space up and thereby, create wealth. The private sector creating more, Honourable Speaker, is more effective.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The ripple effect is much, much better than the Government, taking up that space. It is only crowding out the private sector, and only the cronies benefit from it.

Mr. Speaker, Governments appears to be unaware that revenue should drive expenditure, not the other way around, where FijiFirst expenditure is driving revenue.

Mr. Speaker, when expenditure drives revenue, taxation becomes haphazard, as to squeeze revenue from the people to satisfy the insatiable appetite for spending by FijiFirst.

To squeeze people to the hilt, Mr. Speaker, mountains of regulations are created stifling commerce, and this is one of the reasons why Fiji has dropped in its ranking to the rear in terms of Ease of Doing Business. Too many regulations and it is driven fundamentally by this expenditure driving revenue.

When you look at this, Mr. Speaker, you remember in the Book of Luke in the New Testament - Chapter 14: 28-29, the Good Lord was telling the people in one of those parables, He said, "Do not build the house unless you have the money to complete it." First, you have the money and then you plan to build the house. And exactly what He was saying was this, revenue should be driving expenditure, not the way FijiFirst is doing it.

Mr. Speaker, FijiFirst has failed miserably in creating growth in the productive sectors. We need to create critical mass in the productive sectors, Mr. Speaker. Let me just highlight some of your accomplishments of the Government of the past. Government in the past created critical mass in sugar, banana, coconut, pine, mahogany, tourism, dairy, beef and fish, and also Sigatoka Valley as the salad bowl of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, critical mass is the minimum size or amount of something required to start or maintain a venture. In business, critical mass refers to the size a company needs to reach in order to efficiently participate in the market. We need to create critical mass for our productive sector, and most of them today, Honourable Speaker, are languishing. Critical mass is key to the economic growth in this country.

Cane production, Mr. Speaker, we have spoken all about it, should be at 4 million tonnes as a minimum. Yield per hectare today is about 40 tonnes. With our neighbours in Australia, it is 100 tonnes. In actual fact, there is a farmer in Labasa, who is yielding more than 100 tonnes per hectare. He is doing that but on average across the country, it is only down to 40 tonnes.

Mr. Speaker, I talk about land, approximately 80,000 hectares are available for cane farming in Fiji, and under 40,000 hectares are under cultivation. So it is a failure by FijiFirst to create critical mass by applying itself, to make sure all these land is planted with sugar.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture with its many possibilities, we were promised an agriculture revolution. I do not like to belabour this, but when I heard that I was thinking about critical mass. But if you go and buy from the stalls on the roadside that have been recently created, some are near empty and some are empty, which would tell us that the revolution did not take place. In any event, that was our suggestion, that we build stalls for our people in the villages.

Mr. Speaker, the possibilities are limitless. Critical mass can be for ginger, *dalo* (taro), rice, sweet potatoes, sweet corn, pawpaw, carrots, pineapple, rice, vegetables, and others. I have spoken about sweet potatoes, Honourable Speaker. In the Sigatoka region, the soil there is ideal for *kumala* (sweet potatoes) one of the best in Fiji. We can create *kumala* there on a critical mass and feed the whole of Fiji and Honourable Speaker, it has been established as one of the best food for diabetes.

With our NCD problem in Fiji, we can create critical mass by planting more of that crop and help economic growth and alleviate NCD. Honourable Speaker, we talked about PACER Plus. We cannot have PACER Plus if we do not have critical mass in our productive sectors.

Tourism has some semblance of critical mass but the potential is there for one million visitors which we cannot seem to achieve inspite of the quality of the Fiji product, the new planes, a new terminal building, a marketing budget and of course the many expatriates running the show, we still cannot make a million visitors, Honourable Speaker.

We used to spend, they say that I am an expert in tourism, Honourable Speaker, but during my time we were spending \$25 to secure and capture a visitor. Today, with the budget they have is now crossing \$37 to capture one visitor and during my time, we were all locals. Now, there are a lot of expatriates, so it should be getting better.

Mr. Speaker, IMF has warned about all these spending by Government and the lack of growth in the productive sectors. And I believe, we will simply run out of space and we are trying to tighten the belt. There are different views on liquidity, Mr. Speaker, but one thing is for certain, interest rates for bank loans has sky rocketed and many companies now have shelved their plans for expansion.

I know that firsthand, Mr. Speaker, I am chairman of a mid-size corporation and we are facing that problem right now. Confidence has plummeted and difficult times ahead and as someone had observed after years of reckless spending, the chickens have come home to roost.

Mr. Speaker, Government is irresponsible. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, there could be a better focus on our native population. We are the most numerous in this country. They own the most land, they are not being developed in a way to uplift the economy. I think it is a very irresponsible for FijiFirst to continue the neglect, our people the iTaukei who could do so much to bring the economy of this country to the level that we all want to see.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this Budget. It is not suitable for this time and it falls far short of what we expect for our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Gavoka for his statement and I now give the floor to the Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Honourable Members Parliament. I rise in support of the 2019-2020 National Budget as delivered by the Honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do so in support of a Budget that has exceeded all expectations and predictions, especially those who saw an opportunity to try and discredit it and the FijiFirst Government even before the Budget announcement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regardless of their failed attempts at sabotage, this is a Budget that is smart in its rationale and clear in its setting of fiscal goals and achievable outputs and outcomes. Every dollar allocated is allocated with clear purpose and intent for its spending and identify benefits for all Fijians. It is a Budget of the time and for the times. A Budget that addresses the issues of today for the economic and social wellbeing for all Fijians for tomorrow and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me express my gratitude to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his team for presenting a responsible, responsive and forward-thinking Budget.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- I support the Budget for its environmentally prudent and responsible allocations including provisions for green and blue economic growth. These are areas of particular interest to stakeholders in my portfolio including workers, employers, investors and our youth.

I am pleased to note the priority given to the inclusive allocations for digital transformation and enhancement in all sections of the economy. From e-portals and platforms that are enabling in areas of the economy such as revenue collection to contributing to our wellness and health in a conducive e-atmosphere for workers and investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Budget delivered with clear and concise terms, the benefits of drawing a fiscal policy based on dialogue and a consultative process. As the Honourable Minister for Economy outlined in his Address, this is a Budget dialogue rather than an announcement as it reflects the will of all Fijians who contributed to this process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in continuing in the spirit of this dialogue, allow me to make a few general comments before I turn to specific remarks relating to areas of employment, productivity and industrial relations, youth and sports that fall under my ministerial portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is well served across this diverse range of impact areas by the Budget. It is after all a ministerial portfolio that touches the lives of all Fijians from putting food on the table to bringing joy in our lives through the achievements of our sports champions and youth.

As outlined in the Budget Address, Fiji has gone through the past decade of never seen or achieved before economic growth. Ten years of economic growth and this must be told time and again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it was only achieved by the FijiFirst Government that has grown in confidence as it has provided an environment of progress, peace and stability for all Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- And Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must say that economic growth for all in Fiji has been achieved through a range of far reaching and visionary budget plans and policies

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of these budget provisions has improved the lives of all Fijians, in particular, those who have been disadvantaged in the past.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, growth that is sustainable and relevant to all Fijians is a unique achievement by the FijiFirst Government and one that continues to deliver in its second term in Office. This record decade of continued economic growth has been achieved within a framework that meets the basis for sustainable, equitable, relevant and people focused development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an achievement that meets the basis for sustainable growth set by the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, when he said, and I quote:

“Saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, advancing economic growth; these are one and the same fight. We must connect the dots between climate change, water scarcity, energy shortages, global health, food security and women’s empowerment. Solutions to one problem must be solutions for all.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have moved forward with this Budget dialogue and let us not forget that this is the period of unprecedented economic growth and progress has also been one where Fiji under our Honourable Prime Minister has taken to the world stage on issues spearheaded by his timely and noble leadership on climate change as the Chair of COP 23.

It is also a period where the FijiFirst Government has invited the world to set up stage in Fiji, be it the Pre-COP 23 or the recent Annual General Meeting of the Asian Development Bank or closer to my portfolio, in the historic hosting of the 2019 International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) Junior World Championship.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the first time that any Oceania Nation has hosted any world championships in any IOC at any level. This achievement came on the back of our hosting of the Super Rugby match and capped off by our win in the World Sevens Series, an elevation to the world

champions. A weekend that truly showcased Fiji as a leader and innovator in the region and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I join the Honourable Prime Minister and I take this opportunity to congratulate the Fiji Sevens side and the Fiji Rugby Union and recognise that this sets the ideal platform for the Rugby World Cup later this year and the defence of our Olympic Gold Medal in Tokyo 2020.

The elevation of Fiji onto the global stage as leaders of innovation in Oceania is a direct reflection of the economic, social and political stability under the FijiFirst Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and to grow champions and expand our role on the regional and global sporting stage, I welcome the allocation made for sports. This includes funding of over \$4 million for the preparation and hosting of the international tournaments in a diverse range of sports. This includes key events, such as the 2019 Rugby World Cup, HSBC World Sevens Rugby Series, 2020 Paralympics Qualifiers, Football Under – 16 Qualifiers, World Bowls Championship 2020 and, of course, the 2020 Summer Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, we welcome the \$3.1 million for hosting events including football, netball, surfing and rugby in the coming year, and the \$1.5 million for the 2019 Oceania Men's and Women's Rugby Sevens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that sports is greatly expanding its role in providing professional player pathways in a range of sports with current remittance hitting the \$20 million mark annually. Sports also generates a wide variety of local economic activity from corn sellers to sports merchandising. And as a nation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must acknowledge that such sports branding and achievements makes Fiji a credible nation internationally, a Fiji where we attract more funding options and attract investment leading to job opportunities and diversifications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must continue to grow the Fijian brand through our global presence and sports play a leading role in that area. By sustaining brand Fiji, we sustain the Fijian people, a Fiji where aspiration becomes reality for all Fijians and as this budget has strongly advocated education and training, this provides the means of having a skillset that makes for a productive and growing Fiji.

In relation to the portfolios of employment, productivity and industrial relations, the Budget continues to prioritise in a smart manner by developing a skilled workforce to meet current and future demands. The Budget in its allocation allows through a multi-sectoral approach for the foundation of a knowledge-based nation and a skills nation. A Fiji where we have skilled and productive workers in all sections of the economy, from the farms to fisheries, to the digital world that we are embracing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the honourable Minister for Economy has outlined, these programmes are necessary as we play catch-up after years of neglect by these among other sectors by previous governments. Because of these outright neglect, we have lost at least two generations of skilled workers and trained professionals. It is within this context that we must frame the achievements of the FijiFirst Government in rebuilding and refocusing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this rebuilding of Fiji in all aspects of Fijians' lives is perhaps, best displayed in the way the FijiFirst Government undertook to rebuild with purpose after a series of extreme weather events headlined by *TC Winston*. The FijiFirst Government chose not to take shortcuts or as the honourable Minister for Economy said, "Has chosen not to engage in band-aid solutions." Instead, the rebuilding process has been one where mitigation against future such events have been included in the planning and implementation of the post-disaster process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is pertinent to point out that even developed nations have taken time often, even decades to recover from such events, *Hurricane Katrina* being a case in point in the United States of America. In that regard, the recovery, rehabilitation and the mitigation efforts post-*TC Winston* is indicative of a resilient and committed FijiFirst Government ready and able to meet any challenges head-on. All these must be given context without some of the most people-friendly tax and economic initiative to be found anywhere in the world. The recovery efforts were not based on increased taxes, indeed it took place in a period when VAT was reduced to 9 percent and taxable individual income.

Let me repeat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, individual income, not family income, and threshold was increased to \$30, 0000 along with other attractive tax incentives. Smart thinking, smart planning and even smarter implementation of the tax revenue collection have also exemplified the success of the FijiFirst economic planning and policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the figures we have, previous Governments, if they had properly implemented tax regime and tax revenue collection in the first 30 years since Independence, would have left a better legacy of infrastructure, employment opportunities and development in general.

Without such measures and enforced compliance as citizens, all taxpayers need to ensure that if they make money, they make profits then they should feel entitled to ensuring the taxable portions are given to Government.

We need to have a shift in the mindset to this sense of entitlement to pay tax and not to avoid it. On a related note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the initiative to increase to 100 percent tax rebates on the employer FNPF contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this means Fijian companies and employers have an added incentive to ensure timely and compliant payments of their contributions to safeguard our workers, and I am confident that our friends in this sector will do the right thing for their businesses by doing the right thing for the workers of this country and pay their FNPF fully and on-time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these economic initiatives, policies and plans and its achievements by the FijiFirst Government has happened and continues to happen, while the Opposition ride in with their stories of doom and gloom. Even as we speak, the Opposition continues to spread the falsehood of economic collapse.

We all know when and by whom the economy Budget and Bank collapse. But, then the Opposition has a history of collapse around them, including the failed Budget of 1993 and the collapse of the SVT Government, despite having an unprecedented and absolute House and Senate majority. That was the so-called SVT boom that went bust even before it bloomed.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is of special note that stakeholders, such as the Fiji Association of Accountants, have identified and supported the Budget for its innovations of five Pillars of economic growth, including a premium on our youth. The private sector has also shown their support most notably through the assessment by the ANZ Bank of the fiscal responsibility shown in the Budget.

This allocation rationale is geared towards the present policies and are inclusive of youths and geared towards the future growth that aligns with our 5 Year and 20 Year National Development Plan. I welcome and support the Budget for its alignment of the multi-sectoral initiatives that overlap and duplicate such as youth awards under one umbrella.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Youth and Sports based on the outcome statement from the successful National Youth Sports Conference will continue with programmes identified, especially in non-formal education and training areas of our youths.

As such, I welcome the Budget allocation for this purpose that covers a range of activities and professions from agriculture to fisheries to forests and trade. We will continue to provide a platform for dialogue and consensus-building so our youth continue to have a voice in developments that affect them more than other Fijians.

On a related note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the first-ever Fiji National Job Fair also provided opportunities for employees and employers to interface. The National Job Fair was well-supported by the youth demographic and provided an opportunity to once again listen to their views on employment. Honourable Speaker, late last week it was an honour to receive the Employment Productivity Master Plan, developed for Fiji by the Asian Productivity Organisation (APO).

The Master Plan will allow my Ministry to integrate into key policy areas the mechanism towards a more productive Fiji. Productivity or the lack of it, Honourable Speaker, Sir, has been identified by all stakeholders as a pressing issue in Fiji.

The Master Plan and its implementation towards a more productive Fiji will align with this budget's rationale for a leaner and meaner economy. A more productive Fiji will attract more investments and more robust economy. This will mean that workers, businesses and Fiji will gain with a premium on working smarter and making greater gains on productivity, and greater gains for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the timely and welcome budget allocation, Fiji will be celebrating 50 years of independence in 2020. This is an opportune time to reflect on the past fifty years, and to be honest and recognise the years of wasted opportunities.

As outlined earlier, this year of bust, rather than boom, the years of mismanagement and under-achievements. The 2019-2020 Budget is a telling document for many reasons, including those that I have outlined earlier, and as added to my colleagues, it will no doubt be given additional weight in the address to follow.

It is a document that shows clearly the accelerated progress under the FijiFirst Government, the kind of progress that all Fijians will want for the next 50 years. Progress based on inclusive, smart, globally-aligned and policies for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as outlined by the Honourable Minister for Economy, the FijiFirst Government has a solid and proven record of recovery from events that are not of their making, whether it is the global financial meltdown, extreme weather events, or the legacy or failed Governments and Governance.

The 2019-2020 Budget further proves Fiji against the bust and burn years of the past Governments, including those led by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. It ensures a future of progress and development for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry, in summary, is well-served across these diverse range of impact areas by the Budget. In supporting the Budget, I welcome the allocation, plans and robust policies for our workers, our investors and our employers, and inclusion of youth through multi-sectoral provisions.

I welcome the budget for its care for all Fijian families and the provision for the green and blue economy growth. I welcome the budget for ensuring the we spend within our means, but get the best value for whatever we spend and that spending will be relevant, sustainable and lead to short, medium, and long term gains.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, there has been some comments made in regards to the National Minimum Wage Rate. Let me remind this Honourable House that the consultant was misquoted by the media and ...

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... let me also remind this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there has been no recommendation made to the Government by the consultant on the minimum wage rate, so let us be clear on that. Please, stop spreading lies.

(Laughter)

Stop spreading lies, because this is something to do with our very poor of this country, so let that process happen, that is my humble request to the Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Members, I thank you all and reiterate my support for the 2019-2020 Budget.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports, for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Anare Jale. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. JALE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Government's 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill 2019.

I have to say that it is a great marketing stunt and the spin doctors have been at it again and clearly with the \$1 million allocation to Qorvis Communications, they continue to leave their footprint with emotive language to pull at the hearts of the ignorant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have 4 points to make:

1. Lack of Policy coherence with the Sustainable Development Goals, despite commitments at the United Nations;
2. lack of clear guidelines for overseas missions;
3. there is nothing new in the Civil Service reform; and
4. inadequate commitment to maritime shipping and development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in September 2015, our Honourable Prime Minister, along with other leaders of the 193 members of the United Nations, adopted the 2013 Agenda containing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All members of the United Nations are committed to domesticate their commitments to this development consensus.

This is shown clearly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Government's 5-year and 20-year Development Plans that within the global community, as a member of the United Nations, and I quote:

“Fiji supports an inclusive and participatory approach to sustainable development and recognises that development partnership and co-operation should be guided by the Nation’s 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.”

So, it is rather hypocritical that even with the recent visit and fanfare to hosting the UN Secretary-General, there is not a single reference to the Agenda 2030 and SDGs in the Budget Address. This Budget completely fails to reflect clear alignment and with the reference to SDGs. It is clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Bainimarama-led Government is intending to market its popularity abroad but fails to demonstrate real commitment at home.

This lack of policy coherence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is what the international community will note in this Budget. It is sad, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I bring to the attention of Parliament, Fiji’s commitment to report to the United Nations in July this year (that is in four weeks’ time) on its Voluntary National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is not acceptable that the Government has not submitted to the floor of Parliament this Report so that we, the people of Fiji, can know whether the words of the Prime Minister Bainimarama at the General Assembly, reflects what the reality is in the domestic scene.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, speaking on SDGs, it is unimaginable that in relation to SGD 5 on Gender, this is a gender-blind budget. Nowhere in the Budget Address is a reference to Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality, not even a single word on gender. Women and girls make up 50 percent of our Fijian population and clearly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the world needs to know that here again, with the ambition of SDGs, in leaving no one behind, this Government has deliberately shown women and girls do not matter.

On Foreign Affairs, Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is well-highlighted that over the past 49 years, Fiji has showcased its capability to lead the world on critical issues confronting humanity, from climate change to oceans’ sustainability and the protection of human rights.

As you are aware, Sir, and from my experience as a former Diplomat, it is a financial burden to the Government to meet the cost of operating a mission in a foreign country. The general cost of embassy and accommodation for the diplomatic staff, the location allowance paid to mitigate the cost of living where missions are located, the education cost for dependent children, the operation and administrative cost of the mission, the medical cost, the travel costs for emergency for diplomats or members of families who have to come to Fiji to attend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is most important that there is a properly considered criteria in place to guide Fiji in the decision on whether or not a Mission has to be established in any country in the world. I had previously questioned the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs in this House to explain the criteria that the FijiFirst Government have. But it is obvious that there is nothing concrete in place. This leaves it open for political expediency, where the Government’s decision is not based on a proper geo-political assessment that should advance the national interest, and in consideration of the cost benefit analysis.

The decision to open up Fiji Missions in South Africa, Brazil and Ethiopia, and to close them again after only a few years in operation, confirms that the decision to open the missions have been through lack of strategic consideration and poor planning, which does not augur well in our diplomatic and foreign relations. We have wasted a lot of money in the process that could have been directed to sectors in our economy to develop and improve the standard of living for the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard on numerous occasions in this House, honourable Government Members, more so the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and

Communication, making glowing praises of the Singapore Government and her achievements in various fields. May be because he is biased; I understand that he was schooled in that country.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. A. JALE.- I wonder why Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government had not learnt a lesson from Singapore on how she runs and administers her foreign relations.

Singapore is a story of successes, an economic giant that countries in the world look up to with respect. Yet, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you well know, most of her Ambassadors and High Commissioners are home based, and they occasionally visit countries that they are accredited to when the need arise.

Fiji is a small developing country, yet wasting a lot of scarce resources, opening missions around the world that bring about limited advantage to our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have heard the Government boasting about our successes and impacts worldwide. The appointment of Fiji's Ambassador in Geneva, to be the Deputy Chairperson of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, has been rated historical. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, serious human right abuses have been taking place in our neighbouring countries, our own Melanesian brothers and sisters in West Papua, and we have chosen to look the other way.

The Government of Indonesia, under the guise of sovereignty, has been using its military might to enslave and slaughter innocent West Papuans in their own land and country for standing up and demanding the right to be heard and to govern themselves without oppression from Indonesia.

How long can Fiji close her ears to the cries for freedom from our fellow Melanesians whose rights have been denied to them for so long a time? Mr. Speaker, Sir, I question why Fiji is continuing its diplomatic relations with the countries whose human rights record is one of the worst in the world? It is blatantly obvious that Fiji, through the Bainimarama-led Government, has succumbed to Indonesia's cheque book diplomacy. What a shame!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me put the Indonesian Government on notice. The SODELPA Government will review Fiji's relationship with her and is open to all options that will see Fiji upholding and adhering fully to international human rights principles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communication touched on Civil Service Reforms which he says, and I quote:

“...will bring about a civil service that is responsive, efficient, effective, free of corruption, rid of nepotism defined by fair remuneration and clear path to advancement.”

Beautiful words but meaningless with the opposite being done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the values of the civil service are now to my understanding stipulated in the Civil Service Act previously known as the Public Service Act. One of the values in that appointments to Civil Service positions are on merit after undergoing a competitive selection process.

During my time in the Civil Service, the Act and the policy of the Civil Service stipulated very clearly that no one who has been convicted of a criminal offence that carries a maximum penalty of 12 months or more shall be employed in the Civil Service. Nepotism was never tolerated. Nepotism is a form of corruption in the laws of many countries that have anti-corruption agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Civil Aviation had gone into a great length lecturing the people of Fiji on unacceptable behaviours. Stomping on a small packet of milk provided under the Government's Free Milk Scheme in his view an unacceptable behaviour. The honourable Attorney-General has been able to see the specks in the eyes of others but he had failed to notice the logs and the wood in his eyes, and those of his colleagues on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, never in the 36 years that I have served in the Civil Service, that I have witnessed the display of the most serious example of nepotism in the Civil Service. The very ones that have been portraying themselves as clean and faultless are the ones practising and condoning nepotism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, never in my time in the Civil Service where someone who had been convicted and imprisoned for a serious criminal offence, been appointed to the highest level in the Civil Service, and to make things worse, appointed to head the Correctional Service Department.

Although this happened some years ago, the implication is still relevant and a challenge to us all. How dare one can talk about accountability and transparency with this type of display of arrogance? The people of Fiji are watching with disbelief and concern. The Public Service Commission should hang its head in shame for being party to the appointments, and in due process trending on the laws that it was tasked to protect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you are not being recognised for your skills, professionalism and experience and have been bypassed for promotion by those that do not merit promotion, you lose faith in the service. This leads to brain drain and loss when civil servants opt to leave for greener pastures that treat employees fairly and practice equal opportunity for everyone. The consequence is the low level of Civil Service productivity where civil servants are not giving their all to the roles they perform. The quality and quantity of the work suffer and loss of Government resources through sabotage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have followed a hard and long path to localisation in the Civil Service. We have spent a lot of money training and up-skilling civil servants. The Graduate Cadet Scheme which was known at that time as Graduate Training Scheme is not a new scheme, it was one of the ways that the Government at that time, followed to identify graduates for leadership roles in the Civil Service. Unfortunately, it seems that we have lost our way.

The Bainimarama-led Government has reversed a plan and is depending more and more on expatriates to hold top positions in the Civil Service and CEO positions in other entities and statutory bodies. We have been losing our trained leaders to other parts of the world. We are now paying expatriates about three times more than our qualified locals. I know from experience that these expatriates have to depend on the skills of our locals to patch up their shortcomings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir the civil servants are facing a very difficult time. The insecurity in the civil service is unprecedented to use the FijiFirst favourite term. They worry about their future and that of their dependents. The short term contracts that are now the norm in the civil service cannot provide civil servants the security to obtain a home loan from the banks.

The politicisation of the Civil Service has been legalised by the 2013 Constitution. Ministers have a say in the recruitment to civil Service positions in their Ministries. Who you are; which part of Fiji you are from; your parents, political affiliation, what I am told the criteria of appointment, promotion and renewable of contracts these days.

The proud Civil Service which was the envy of countries in the region have gone and lost. The Civil Service that once provided the opportunity for one to progress from the base level in the Civil Service to the apex of the scale is no more. What a pity!

All is not lost, civil servants listening to my speech at this time, SODELPA has heard your cries and pains and will bring back permanent appointment and the performance management system when it comes to power soon.

On shipping, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocation for shipping service subsidy remains the same to the allocation for the last financial year despite the call for safe, affordable and reliable shipping service to the maritime province. The Government Shipping Services has again been allocated \$F3 million for the purchase of a new ship. It appears that it is the same unutilised allocation for the 2018-2019 Budget. What is the Government waiting for? Are you waiting for the time when one of the current franchise old fishing boats will sink and take its passengers with it?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the responsibility of the Government to provide shipping services to the maritime provinces, and what is being allocated in the Budget is peanuts compared to the amount that have been allocated to roads in the main islands in Fiji. The Government should hold true to its promise that the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development will implement strategies that will bring Fijians living in rural and maritime regions the same level of access to essential services and economic activities as anywhere else in the country. I thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Anare Jale for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Honourable Ministers, Assistant Ministers and Members of Parliament, I rise to contribute to the National Budget debate of 2019-2020 presented to the august House by the Honourable Minister for Economy on 7th June, 2019.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for presenting a very well thought out and comprehensive Budget proposal for 2019-2020 fiscal year. The methodology of consultation and wide ranging involvement of communities, government entities and key stakeholders in the budget preparation through a participatory processes is innovative and underlines this government's continuing efforts to be and remain inclusive.

Global issues including the economy downturn which will impact national economic growth and deep concern of its implications on the lives of our people is the foundation of this year's Budget preparation. And while aspects are designed to protect and stabilise Fiji's economy from the uncertainties of the global economic crisis, it also, nevertheless, takes a bold step in looking to the future and to:

- build on the foundations established in education, with an abiding trust in its value in empowering our youth to be effective and active and skilled participants in a changing global economy and as future servants of this country.
- maintain support to our people, especially those who underprivileged; and
- vigorously take responsibility to address the critical issues of the impact of climate change on our environment and our life.

Let me tell the other speakers that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the gender policy strategies are all incorporated in every aspects and programmes of the Government across all Ministries, and are not implemented vertically as the Opposition might think.

The FijiFirst Government under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, has once again demonstrated through this Budget process that they care for and listen to the people while making decisions on key policy issues affecting our nation.

Reading through every paragraph of the Budget, it is very clear that this Budget can be called “a Budget that has put the country and the people first, and not the Government or politics ahead of them.”

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to give few examples to support why this is a people-centred Budget.

A large proportion of the budget has been rightly allocated to the education sector. To me, education is the only weapon we have to fight against poverty. It empowers people, strengthen them and given them confidence.

Research has shown that when our people are educated and equipped with knowledge, they are able to improve their socio-economic status with a flow on effect to the next generation.

It has been also been shown that girls and mothers who have reached secondary education have lower infant and maternal mortality rates than those who have lower level of formal education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the early stages of HIV/AIDS pandemic, great focus was on educating the public on how the HIV virus was transmitted and how people can avoid getting infected. This resulted in a major decrease in the HIV infection rates in many societies around the world.

Through proper education, especially health and nutrition education, we will be able to drastically reduce the current rising incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases facing our nation today.

Honourable Speaker, the National Budget has focussed on several key initiatives to increase school enrolment through free education, free transport, free educational materials, adequate numbers of well qualified teachers, et cetera. However, the onus is on the public and parents not to abuse the system, but to take this seriously and support their children to obtain better education for a better life ahead.

Health of our nation; we need healthy people to build a healthy nation. This year’s budget on health has focussed on delivering and strengthening quality health services accessible to all.

Fiji has been well known globally to have the best primary healthcare system through a tier of community-based nursing stations, Health Centres, Subdivisional Hospitals and Divisional Hospitals.

The FijiFirst Government has taken a step further by linking the formal primary healthcare services to the community by bringing health into the homes of the people through community healthcare workers.

For the first time in the history of Fiji’s health service, even the community health workers will be supported and remunerated for their work. Through the work of the community health workers, people living in remote areas will be able to access primary health services, have their illnesses diagnosed early and be referred to the formal health service in time for treatment.

The FijiFirst Government is also the first in taking Fiji's health services to the next level of healthcare that is urgently needed in our country. The tertiary health services have never been developed in a systematic manner over the years and no previous Government had the courage to take this bold step in systematically developing the tertiary healthcare services.

Through the Public Private Partnership (PPP), the Lautoka and Ba Hospitals will become the living model of comprehensive healthcare delivery system. Once fully developed and equipped, people in Fiji and the rest of the region will be able to access world-class tertiary healthcare services - care for heart disease, kidney disease, stroke and other conditions which currently rely on treatment abroad at huge costs, will be treated at home. Thus, out of pocket payments which currently cause hardship to our people, will be avoided with those modern facilities. Collaboration with other health partners, including our local general practitioners and visiting teams have also been supported in this year's Budget, and this is commendable.

Health is everyone's business. As I have said before in this august House that health is not only the business of the Ministry of Health and the Government, health is everyone's business. Health in all policies, either be of Government, private sector or non-Government sector, is the right approach to improve the health of our nation and I urge all, including our Opposition, to head this way.

Our Government in this year's Budget has demonstrated this approach very clearly by focusing and allocating budget in every other Ministry and Department that will improve and impact on people's health and wellbeing.

Water and sanitation are basic human rights and a must to improve human health. A large proportion of the Budget has been allocated so that every household has clean and safe drinking water, especially those located in rural areas. This will go a long way in reducing the communicable diseases epidemic, such as diarrhoea, typhoid and salmonella.

A first of its kind activity to provide sanitation facility alongside the highways for the convenience of the public and tourists is, again, a great new initiative by the FijiFirst Government. No one before even thought of how important and necessary this is for the travelling public. This year's Budget has continued to focus on the poor, the vulnerable, the elderly, the disadvantaged and people with disability by providing welfare assistance and transport subsidy.

Youth and young people are also the focus of this year's Budget. Several initiatives to encourage young people to start businesses, sporting and community developments, are being supported. This is a great example to involve our young people in nation-building.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, this year's Budget is well thought-out and has taken into account the needs of the poor and vulnerable people by providing support and services, and at the same time creating opportunities for economic growth.

With those few words, I fully support the 2019-2020 Budget. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room and Parliament will resume in half-an-hour. The Secretary-General will indicate to you when that half-an-hour is up. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.55 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.29 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; listening to the Honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, on his Budget Address on the 7th of this month, talking about the vision of empowerment, the vision entering its second revolution, then using his usual buzz words - unprecedented, never before, celebrating nine straight year of growth, record breaking, expected GDP to grow \$12.7 billion this year, making for a 10 straight years of growth; boggles the mind and even more so when you come to know the real story from the real figures.

Then he goes on in his usual manner to vilify and denigrate achievements by previous Governments to talk about FijiFirst's so-called historic achievements and the Bainimarama Boom, which he claims has more than doubled the size of the economy.

Honourable Speaker, just to set the records straight, looking at Fiji's GDP growth rate in the 10 year intervals post-Independence between 1971 and 2020, are as follows:

- 1971-1980; 4.85 percent;
- 1981-1990; 2.46 percent;
- 1991-2000; 2.12 percent;
- 2001 – 2010; 1.36 percent; and
- 2011 – 2020; predicted to be 3.18 percent.

And the GDP growth in five year intervals post-Independence, Honourable Speaker, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, during his tenure as Prime Minister is still the highest from 1971 to 1975 at 5.86 percent. So the GDP growth rate, Honourable Speaker, is as follows:

- Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in 1971 to 1991; 3.4 percent;
- Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka in 1992 to 1999; 3.6 percent;
- Honourable Mahendra Chaudhry, there was a deficit of 1.7 percent;
- Honourable Laisenia Qarase in 2001 to 2006; 2 percent; and
- Honourable Prime Minister in 2007 to 2020; 2.4 percent.

So, Honourable Speaker, there is no Bainimarama Boom.

In actual fact in terms of history, FijiFirst have very little to go about. Although they have been in Government the longest, coming through the 2006 Bainimarama *coup*, the so-called Bainimarama Boom has not been the best performing Prime Minister according to the GDP figures from the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) and Bureau of Statistics, although they should be, having been the longest in Government.

Now, to education, since I have set the record straight there, Honourable Speaker. I will be responding to the Ministry of Education Budget, whilst Honourable Mikaele Leawere will be looking at Higher Education Institutions.

Honourable Speaker, SODELPA has always advocated the establishment of the National Education Commission to realign the education system to meet the needs of the labour market.

Education is the cornerstone for social and economic development. It is also a basic human right which will be the foundation of SODELPA's intervention. The establishment of an Education Commission to carry out a holistic review of our education system will be given priority.

If only FijiFirst Government had listened to their Minister in 2014 when he promised an Education Commission, but the proposal was not approved by Cabinet. And that is why five years later, education is in such a mess today, and I can show it to you on the Daily Hansard Report, Honourable Minister.

“*Areh*, Minister if only they had listened to you, for your efforts and your ideas. You were replaced by AG, who knows next to nothing about education and created an even bigger mess. When he realised he knew very little about this Ministry, he quickly passed it on to the Honourable Rosy Akbar, whose job is to bring in the boom and maybe the *sasa* broom to clean-up the bigger mess. *Isa lei*.”

Honourable Minister, in her response this afternoon, stated the increase in student numbers, the increase in teacher numbers, but there will be a huge increase in the Ministry of Education Budget of \$200 million, and to provide quality education that she is talking about, will be a humongous challenge as you will see when talking about the numbers that are available.

For the Ministry of Education, Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of Education's budget, an allocation of \$802.6 million with:

- \$467.7 million allocated to the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts;
- \$115.6 million for Higher Education Institutions;
- \$181.8 million for various scholarship schemes and loans administered by the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board (TSLB);
- \$35 million for rehabilitation and reconstruction of schools damaged by recent tropical cyclones;
- \$1.7 million for Agricultural and Vocational Training for Rural Communities; and
- \$850,300 as a grant to the Frank Hilton Organisation.

This \$802.6 million budget is \$200 million less than last year's budget of \$1 billion and that should be a cause for concern. So where is the boom? Why the decrease? Let me try to explain.

Firstly, we hear the Ministry is undergoing an organisational structure to streamline its systems and strengthen its capacity to respond to the current needs of the sector. How they determine the current needs of the sector, no one yet knows?

Then they go onto say, Honourable Speaker, that all structural modernisation will provide strategic oversight for mapping out the long term development of Fiji's education system, allowing it to adapt to the demands of rapid technological advances and globalisation.

Bearing in mind, Honourable Speaker, that the Education Permanent Secretary is not local with advisors and cronies who are not local, having arrived here with a sports background from overseas and with no education experience. She is positioned as the Permanent Secretary for the important Ministry of Education. One would be rightfully concerned in the absence of any meaningful study or available

data, how and where the much needed local content would be factored in into the demands of these planned rapid technological advances and globalisation is anyone's guess.

Are they saying, Honourable Speaker, that technology and globalisation will take over the system? Does this budgetary decrease reflect that? And does that mean there would be fewer teachers? Decrease in pay? Early retirement? So the boom is for whom? How will teachers cope with the new technology? Any allocation for training? How? When? Where? And how will they be trained? Will they be replaced by expatriates? This is a worrying time for civil servants, Honourable Speaker.

One Permanent Secretary has actually been quoted as warning some of his staff that there will be a 15 percent cut across the board. In every Department, Honourable Speaker, in every section of the Ministry, the budget is decreased from early childhood, primary, secondary, special education, the lot, no one is spared.

On the other hand, the Honourable Attorney-General is saying a bit too late in my view that teaching should not be a default career option and that teaching should be respected as a professional undertaking for all levels of education. Yet on the other hand from 2007, they have been treating teachers like beggars who cannot be choosers; three to five-year contract limits on teachers is entirely non-conducive towards anyone wanting to become a teacher. Why are they treating teachers like disposable washing machines? Good only for three to five years, after that get a new one, what happens to the old one? Don't know, don't care!

They are forcing teachers to beg for the posts that they are so good at because they keep moving the goal post. Why did the Honourable Attorney-General not say this about teaching in his previous utterances and support it with resources for a proper career path development for teachers? Why make a big song and dance about MyAPA, instead of just paying it? It is not wonder teachers become so frustrated and have such low morale.

So what have teachers been doing? At any given opportunity, teachers are winning it overseas. Former students of mine I have met overseas lauds the terms and conditions in Australia and New Zealand and other parts of the Pacific where the grasses are greener for themselves and their families and best of all where the goal post does not move.

And besides that, they are actively recruiting other teachers to join them, for it is there that they have found the boom and they want their friends and families to share this boom with them and you can hardly blame them, can you?, when they are contributing to our economy through their hard earned remittances.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Without proper planning and with the retirement age still at 55 years, the Ministry have suddenly found themselves with the shortage of teachers nationwide, where currently there is a shortage of around 350 to 400 teachers. The shortage, Honourable Speaker, is even more profound in the areas of early childhood, primary and specialised areas such in the STEM subjects of Science, Technology, Economics and Maths.

Sadly, because of lack of planning and because people at the Ministry who are hiring teachers have no background in teaching and education, the Ministry is allowing secondary teachers to move into early childhood and primary schools where they do not have specialist skills to handle these children during their formative years and to build the foundation for young minds to grow up to be

healthy young adult citizens, contributing to the development of the country. The children are wondering, Honourable Speaker, why are they being yelled at and roughly handled in what they once thought was a secure and safe environment?

Honourable Speaker, discipline in schools have been highlighted again and again, and even by students themselves to the Attorney-General during his Budget Consultations with them. How is this going to be addressed, Mr. Speaker, when the Honourable Attorney-General removed counselling positions from schools and has not even included an allocation this year, although there was \$300,000 in last year's budget under "R"?

That amount was probably just for show and never used. A lot of times it seems that there is just a lot of talk, a lot of hogwash from the other side, you are listening Honourable Minister Usamate. You know what they say, "talk is cheap and no action". *Sobo!* From this, one wonders how much of students concerns are taken seriously by the Honourable Attorney-General and factored into the Budget.

Now, Honourable Speaker, on the *Walesi* App which sounds so good that according to the Attorney-General over 260,000 have this app at their fingertips to access sports, entertainment and whatever, both good and bad. My worry is the additional entry of Sky Pacific with their offer of another 25 channels.

Truancy, Honourable Speaker, is already a huge problem. What is this going to do to the already high incidents of indiscipline in the schools? Someone said to me and I quote, "*Turaga, 25 Channels, one hour per channel, nothing is going to get done.*" *Sa warai sara la ni dua na ka ena caka*, not enough hours in the day.

Honourable Attorney-General, what were you thinking in negotiating all these distractions for the people, let alone school children whom you accused of riding around anywhere, except to school. So, teachers and parents will have a more difficult time from this app. I am appealing here to parents, Honourable Speaker, please do not buy a smart phone for your children as that will be the only smart thing they will own as they will not have a smart brain, they will not have smart mind, they will not have a smart bone in their body, they will be just silly and will not know what to do. So, that is my plea to parents.

Honourable Speaker, coming back to the Budget Address where the honourable Attorney-General talks about the landmark policies of Free Education, Free Textbooks and Subsidised Transportation to Schools and Free Milk. I noted that there was no mention of laptops, Honourable Minister for Waterways. I noticed there was no mention of laptops where children had been promised one laptop per child. These initiatives were all introduced round about the time or the eve of the 2014 General Election.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I wonder why? So, the planned boom was for whom?

Had the honourable Attorney-General consulted with stakeholders, teachers, guardians, parents, teachers' unions and students themselves instead of just at Budget time, they would have saved millions of taxpayer's funds. But FijiFirst is just too smart, they do not consult with anyone, Honourable Speaker, only themselves. When things go wrong, they blame everyone else; children, parents, teachers and whoever and literally start crying over spilt milk. The stakeholders would have told them that

instead of implementing any initiative Fiji-wide, to trial it first in an education district, which the Ministry of Education has been doing for years *baleta ya na nodra veitavioka*.

Now, the Honourable Attorney-General has mentioned, they took the unusual step of trialling the e-ticketing on buses in the fourth year of implementation, instead of at the beginning. But that is the Honourable Attorney-General, you cannot tell him anything as he knows it all, even moreso at the expense of the taxpayers.

The Auditor-General's Report is always very informative in telling us whether taxpayers' funds are used properly or not, and where the abuse is. According to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report based on the Auditor-General's Report in 2014, the Ministry of Education overspent by \$7.1 million or 2 percent due to various shortcomings in the Ministry, in terms of the Free Education grant. Honourable Speaker, and I am pleading with the Honourable Minister to ensure that this is properly administered.

In terms of the Free Education Grant (FEG), some abuses, for example, were pointed out where \$2.474 million as FEG was dispersed in 2014 to 12 secondary schools under the management of a religious organisation who also owns a university. Long story short, only a small percentage was recovered. There were other examples of abuse, also highlighted and abuses were still occurring two years later according to the Auditor-General's Report.

On free textbooks, Honourable Speaker, I heard the Honourable Minister for Education saying that they are going into e-books. What about e-textbooks? What about rural remote and maritime schools as there are already so many errors in these present textbooks, that they look like they have been printed in a fourth world country.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There is no fourth world country.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Well, you are creating one.

In the 2016 Financial Year, an internal audit on the Primary Section of the Ministry identified that the waiver of tender of free textbooks was a ministerial directive which is clearly against the Financial Management Act 2004. It is illegal as tender was not called for procurement exceeding \$50,000. The cost of this to the Ministry in 2016 was \$1.2 million to print textbooks. These textbooks, however, were not printed within the Ministry's Printing Centre.

On subsidised transportation, Mr. Speaker, training should have taken place in a pilot area like Nausori Education District before country-wide implementation to identify weaknesses in this exercise. Again, the Honourable Attorney-General is blaming everyone, except himself, for the loopholes that allowed these abuses to occur. Last year's allocation was \$25 million and now reduced to \$20 million.

It is common knowledge that students' parents were paying children's fares earlier this year. So, for a \$5 million reduction, this does not make sense and free milk. When you do things for the wrong reason, things do not normally turn out right. For example, this was glaringly another election gimmick for FijiFirst where the children's health and welfare were furthest from their mind, resulting now in the tears over the spilt milk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the free laptops, there were audit findings too on the CJ Patel issue at the schools. On the free laptop again an expensive election gimmick costing taxpayers \$800,000 annually from 2014 and suddenly it has disappeared from the Budget and I wonder why. Audit on 15th December, 2014 carried out physical verification of laptops purchased under this programme, which revealed that some laptops went missing.

However, the Honourable Minister had promised one laptop per child. So he can take his pick; 138,000 Primary School students with one laptop each or 68,000 secondary school students with one laptop each – that was promised and they want to have faith in the FijiFirst Government, and are still waiting for their laptops as promised by the Minister.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, growing up in a primary school in Levuka, when students fabricated the truth, the nuns would wash out their mouth with soap. That is probably what is needed for every one of the 27 Members of Parliament sitting on the other side as it is a collective responsibility starting with the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General. So I am donating to you my packet of boom to help you with the exercise. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order. I am surprised that you are refreshingly fresh today ...

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- ... after your arduous but enjoyable weekend, so during your presentation, if you feel a bit weak at the knees, you can have a rest and I am sure your colleagues in the House will not mind at all.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- But on behalf of all the Honourable Members in the House, we wish you and your good wife the best.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, you have the floor.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you for attending my wedding on Saturday, I really appreciate it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise this afternoon to convey my wholehearted support to the 2019-2020 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to commend the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for a Budget that embraces all Fijians of our nation. Furthermore, the Government's vision for progressive development and ensuring a safe and secure Fiji is expressively addressed in this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, P. Chidambaram, a former Attorney and present Member of Parliament of India has said, and I quote:

“I don't think we should label the Budget even before the Budget is presented.”

The Opposition Members have been misleading the general public in the media about the Budget even before the Budget was presented to Parliament by the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the basic need for every individual is affordable housing and in this Budget, the Government continues to provide the long term leases to informal residential settlements and to provide cost-sharing basis to social housing assistance for rural and maritime regions. Affordable

housing brings stability, economic diversity and improves the physical quality of the neighbourhood, hence the FijiFirst Government is working a lot on this, so every Fijian of our country has a decent housing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Agriculture is the backbone of our country and in this 2019-2020 Budget, we have seen that the Government is supporting the Agriculture sector with other crops and livestock together with sugarcane farming to adapt to changing climate. Agriculture was a neglected Ministry before the FijiFirst Government and today, we can see the progress in livestock farming such as goats, sheep and beef. The Government has been providing...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Where?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- I think honourable Viliame Gavoka has to come to my farm and see how many goats and sheep I have. The Government has been providing fencing materials and the livestock to farmers and also encouraging by conducting workshops. In future, we can reduce the import of meats so that our currency stays in Fiji. It is not only livestock farming but the Government is also helping and encouraging cash crop farming with seeds, fertilisers and pesticides.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, providing the long term leases to agricultural farmers has enhanced productivity as before due to the short term leases and non-renewal of leases under the SDL Government. The SDL Administration has done a great damage to our agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the late George Washington, the first USA President said, and I quote: "Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful and most noble employment of man." The country can prosper if it has a good agricultural budget with right thinking leaders who encourage the people of a nation. The budget for the agricultural sector is \$78.7 million, which is commendable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the FijiFirst Government, every child is given equal opportunity to be educated, free education till form seven and after completing college education, students can get their tertiary education through TELS which reduces the burden from the poor parents.

The late Mahatma Ghandhi said, and I quote: "If we want to reach real peace in this world, we should start educating children." This FijiFirst Government has been instrumental in the education of every child so that we have a literate society."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 Budget is a well-executed budget for all Ministries and with this Budget, Fiji will prosper.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the Budget and my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy for providing a strong budget which will benefit all our people in this country. May God bless this nation and all of us.

Thank you and *Vinaka Vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, and I now give the floor to the honourable Inosi Kuridrani. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise as the Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Sugar to join my colleagues on the Opposition benches, to present my response to the 2019-2020 Budget.

Allow me to comment on the Honourable Minister for Economy's Address for his Budget boom presentation; a presentation which we not only totally disagree, but the proposals made from the basis of our opposition to this budget in addition to the poor track record of the Bainimarama-led Government for the last one decade.

I would also like to register my full support and endorse the Budget response by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition which paves the way to bail out or salvage Fiji from an impending socio-economic disaster which is now imminent with the FijiFirst Government at the helm.

Sir, after meeting with people from all walks of life, those from the constituency that I represent, those on the streets, and even in various consultations, listening to many experts on the economy, I would summarize the 2019-2020 Budget as follows: I agree with what Honourable Bulitavu has said that this Budget can be clearly likened to the popular *iTaukei* idiom and I quote: "*Na i bulubulu boro vulavula.*" This means that this Budget only aspires to have a good image on the outside, but there is stench from the realities on the inside, so when the coffers are dry, revenue-generation becomes a financial anaemia in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I further go and try to explain this Budget. This Budget can also be referred to a house that has been constructed but not constructed properly by someone wishing to be a carpenter himself, by pretending to be one and the result will be doom.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this house that has been constructed today, the walls seem to be flying away, the posts start to be bending, and paints is fading away. Very soon the house will collapse from only strong winds, not cyclone. Who will be blamed? It is the unqualified carpenter. In our Fijian idiom, we call these people, and I quote: "*Matai via kana vuaka.*" They do not know how to build a house, they are just there to feed themselves.

This is the Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question everyone is asking: "Are the economic indicators good as what has been boasted by this Government through all its controlled media outlets, then why has the budget been reduced to \$810 million for the year 2019-2020? This Budget is not adequate to provide the fiscal space that is necessary to cushion any short term shock by way of natural disaster or global crisis.

I should also add that this is a fantasy budget that raises a lot of heat and dust, whilst creating hope and hype but, we, the people continue to wander around, looking for that miracle that has been boasted about, like a camel in the desert who thinks that the sand shining in the distance is a water pool or an oasis but keeps walking towards with sheer hope, all the while eating the stinging cactus fruits and disillusioned by tasting its own blood thinking, it is the sweetness of the cactus fruit.

This is a confused Budget sandwiched between reconciling national interest and its political agenda but also haunted by its habitual extravaganza for populist strides.

This is an unfeasible and unrealistic Budget, given the items listed under "R" which represent about 39 percent of the total budget; \$1.49 billion which shows how uncertain this government is of its own financial security, thus the journey into economic decline continues. I notice that most of the funds allocated are for operation but when it comes to service delivery, it is mostly under "R".

This is a short-sighted Budget because whilst seeking to appease the International Monetary Fund by trimming its expenditures, it grossly compromises the delivery of basic services to the people of Fiji, thus increasing suffering and poverty.

Let me share a story, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I get into the debate to talk about this so-called “boom” budget. Recently, I was on a visit in one of my communities following the Budget presentation and there was a lot of talk about the Budget and specifically its description as a “boom budget”.

A jovial man, with no political inclination, created a joke that the genesis of this government began with an image of clean-up or cleaning up corruption, but it seems that the key figures in this government got so dirty from all that cleaning up process that they needed the Boom brand (I got it here, to clean themselves from all the dirt). They will not settle for just a normal wash, they need a physical, spiritual and mental washing.

The reduction of this Budget was entirely due to the reckless spending behaviour that the Bainimarama-led Government has done and become accustomed to. Expenses have grown over the years but revenue was unable to catch up. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to share a few examples of how reckless the spending of this Government. I look back to the Farm Care Initiative that was distributed in 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the process of distribution of funds lack control and information verification. The *Turaga ni Koro*, who is the government representative was overlooked when he should have done the first screening process. No survey was done by the Agriculture officers.

The Home Care Initiative: the same process done in the Farm Care was repeated here. There was no accountability and transparency and again the role of the *Turaga ni Koro* was overlooked, when he could have been the instrumental player in this process, providing the right information to ensure that the people who really needed help were in fact helped.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I notice that from this two schemes, the province of Kadavu was overlooked. Was it a deliberate exercise, Mr. Speaker, Sir? The Care Initiative, despite the extensive damages that they suffer during *TC Eric* and *TC Nigel* to their farms.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Despite the numerous request made to the authorities, it fell on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I look at the other side of the House, there are three Ministers (Members of Parliament) from Kadavu there, and I wonder, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why did they not influence the architect of the Budget to, at least, help the Kadavu people. There are three of them; Honourable O’Connor, Honourable Koroilavesau and Honourable Usamate but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people in Kadavu support the Budget.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- They need help, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I want to bring to this House an important saying in Vatulele Island. They always say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I quote “*A rewa na kequ niu, a qei takania na lemu waqa.*” That is why these people are here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because of those people there. But here they tend to relax, they tend to live in their big houses, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- But it means that I have done my part, I have got my cut, I have got what I want and you can care for your own life; this is what it means. And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you know, the people of Kadavu will be saying to them in their own dialect, they will be saying, “*mai yaso; i vale e mino.*”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the above schemes not only showed the reckless spending behaviour of the Bainimarama-led Government but also exposed their incompetence, mismanagement, corruption and abuse of office.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- You name it, they did it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now the Government finally realised that it does not have the money in this Budget to spend the way it has been in these past years.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now speak on the budget for Agriculture. It is quite disappointing to note that the allocation for agriculture has been reduced by \$21.1 million. I strongly believe that agriculture is an area that the Government really needs to capitalise its resources on, if it is to solve the major social issues that have been on an increasing trend in the last decade such as food security, poverty, unemployment, lack of entrepreneurship, urban drift, reducing the high rate of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), drugs cultivation and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the agriculture census of 2009, the number of farmers has reduced substantially from 95,400 farmers in 1991, to 65,033 in 2009; that is a reduction of 32 percent. This should ring a warning bell to the Bainimarama-led Government and specifically to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to do something to revive the agriculture industry.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- It is unfortunate that no significant improvement and changes have been noted to date. In March, a friend told me, I asked him about this Government and he said, and I quote in Hindustani, “*bahut baat, khali baat, bahut din maro*”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to address the agriculture sector’s doom rather than boom, I believe it is necessary for the Bainimarama-led Government to reduce its sugar budget from \$70.4 million to \$50.4 million, and transfer the \$20 million to increase the allocation of the agriculture sector to \$98.7 million. The additional \$20 million is to be directed towards increasing crops, livestock development, extension and research which has been under budgeted over the years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the mid-year fiscal statement, the Ministry of Agriculture has only used \$27.5 million out of the \$98 million that was budgeted. If we continue at this rate, we would only use approximately 50 percent of the budgeted money. The question is, this is from your Ministry, the question is, why? Why the delay? Are the funds really available or are they just figures placed to make the budget look good? Whatever it may be, it is exactly why I have called this budget ‘*bulubulu boro vulavula*’.

The cultivation of traditional crops, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have noticed that in the budget for previous years, funding allocations for the development of traditional crops such as *yaqona*, taro, *dalo ni tana*, yams, cassava, coconut and vanilla have been quite low compared to the allocation for sugar, despite the fact that there are more farmers in the non-sugar industry. Is this a continuation of suppression for resource owners?

The coconut industry has been in existence since Independence and is affecting almost 10,000 families, and not much allocation has been given to the industry compared to the sugar industry. And similarly for the dairy industry where the local milk production can only produce approximately 10 million litres wherein the milk consumption is approximately 80 million litres and approximately, and approximately 70 million litres of milk is imported by CJ Patel. But, the sad thing about it to make matters worse, the concession given to CJ Patel is not filtered down to the farmers, and the price of milk is still low compared to the past years.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Your figures are wrong.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Cooperative and insurance against natural disasters unlike sugarcane farmers who are covered under the Bundle Insurance Scheme. Non- sugar farmers lack health insurance as well as insurance in property and farms against accidents and natural disaster for themselves and their families. We need to do more a lot of cooperative, we need to establish more cooperative association as this is in line with our traditional style of attending to task or the *solesolevaki*.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Agriculture crop extension, if we need to increase agriculture contribution to GDP to 15 percent then we need to put more resources into this agriculture.

Livestock Extension: Most dairy farmers are still waiting for the compensation of cattle affected by diseases such as tuberculosis and brucellosis, and with the minimum allocation of this sector, how will we pay the farmers or compensate the farmers?

Beef, according to the Fiji Meat Industry Board Annual Report of 2014, the industry has been operating under capacity for the last decade due to low supply of beef.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- The total income is \$3.8 million in 2013, has decreased to \$3.2 million, unless an urgent revival of the Yalavou Beef Scheme, Uluisaivou Beef Scheme, Verata Beef Scheme, then the industry is doomed.

Sugar: Total budget of sugar is \$70.395 million for approximately 12,000 farmers, compared to the \$78.7 million allocated to 65,000 farmers for non-sugar. What is most surprising, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that other ministries have a reduction in Budget, but the Sugar Industry alone has had an increase. What is so special in here? The operation costs has increased from \$59 million in 2018 to \$65 million in 2020.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Compared to the non-sugar that was reduced from \$57 million in the last Budget to \$40 million in this Budget.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Prasad, you did not brief them well enough.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, how can we justify these changes?

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- We can rightly assume that this could be a deliberate racist move by the Bainimarama-led Government, to continue to suppress indigenous farmers who typically dominate the non-sugar agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that we should know as leaders that proper management of expenditure is fundamental to ensuring value for money in delivering to the community.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to draw your attention about the development in the sugar for three settlement of the expired Alta leases. Look at the Navovo resettlement, the detailed supporting documents for the development cost of \$2.3 million incurred by the Ministry were not available. Although Navovo has 51 fully developed lots, only four farmers have utilised their allocated lots.

As of April 2014, the Ministry has incurred \$109,474 as administrative and lease rental. My question Mr. Speaker, Sir, has the Ministry taken accounts to identify other potential farmers that need to be resettled on this proposed site?

Navudi Estate in Seqqaqa has a total area of 435.4 hectares with 60 lots. Details supporting documents cost \$3.2 million. As of December 31st 2014, only one farmer was occupying the allocated lot.

Vunicibicibi Estate, the total cost of the project was \$1.9 million. However, the land has not been resettled as at 31 December 2014. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with more than \$7.6 million in costs incurred, it is of major concern that the major portion of the land identified to resettle farmers remains unutilized or unoccupied. And yet Mr. Speaker, Sir, they keep saying that ALTA leases cannot be renewed because of the landowners. They are importing a lot of crops that need to be resettled until today he has not done it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You're talking nonsense.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$21.1 million reduction in Agriculture Budget will only spell out an agriculture doom instead of a boom. We should all note that the agriculture sector will continue to be the mainstay of Fiji's economy in the medium and long term.

Although its contribution to GDP has declined from 16 per cent in 1995 to 6 per cent in 2016, more than 50 per cent of our people continue to depend on agriculture as their main source of income and livelihood.

There is absolutely nothing in this Budget to create a boom, instead, it is a charter for doom. It negates every ideal and principle for prudent financial management and makes a mockery of the concept of income redistribution. This Budget compromises our national interest and opens our economy to exploitation by corporate and multinational interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in American politics there was a terminology they used called “Whitewash” in the case of oppressing the people and suppressing the truth. It was later transformed or upgraded to another terminology called “Hogwash”. That is what I see this Budget to be doing to the Fiji economy.

Sir, SODELPA was elected on a clearly defined manifesto and the plank of leadership that listens. We strive for caring leadership, prudent financial management, better services and more freedom for our people. We see very little of that spirit in this Budget. That, which has been explained, coupled with other reasons establishes the basis of our opposition to this Budget.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I oppose this 2019-2020 budget.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani for his contribution to the debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, the Honourable Semi Koroilavesau. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will stick to my Ministry and the Budget, Sir. If I can say that if the contributions by the Opposition be collected and collated, and put into an alternative budget, it will really be a shame.

While the subject contents of the budget and the budget reply should contain some element of facts, they have gone away from that perspective and created havoc. I would say if there is an alternative Government, I would ask them to provide an alternative budget. And from the facts of the previous speakers, I don't think they will be able to put a budget together.

(Chorus of interjection)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fisheries represents Fiji's second largest primary resource sector. With a vision to have the best Fishery in the Region, the Ministry of Fisheries is mandated to protect, sustain and manage this critical national resource.

The Ministry through its Offshore Fisheries Division, Inshore and Coastal Fisheries, Aquaculture, Research, Conservation and Development Division sustains and seeks to grow the sector's contribution to GDP.

For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Ministry has been allocated \$17.1 million. With a provisions of \$11 million for operations and \$5.3 million for capital expenditure. The Ministry is well poised to continue to deliver its services to the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 fiscal envelope allows the Ministry to clearly focus on three key objectives. The first objective of the Ministry is to optimise our service delivery to the people of Fiji, through our 32 service centres. The second objective is to maximise operational efficiency, and the third, is to drive fiscal efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these objectives have been established to ensure that:

1. We increase the outreach of our extension and advisory services and the frequency of these services;
2. Increase the effectiveness of our project implementation; and
3. Increase compliance to fisheries laws and regulations.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 fiscal envelope anchors the Ministry's work on increasing the fisheries sector's contribution to the nation's GDP.

The Ministry's programmes will focus on an increase in aquaculture, coastal and offshore fisheries productivity and decrease in the negative socio-economic impacts that results from non-compliance to our Fisheries Regulations in both, inshore and offshore fisheries.

In aquaculture, Honourable Speaker, Sir, to increase productivity in the aquaculture sector, the Ministry's work hinges on mobilizing the private sector. Hatchery production, advance partnerships, farmer training, research and development, as well as targeted financial assistance will underpin the Ministry's activity in the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the aquaculture programme, the Ministry of Fisheries has an increase in the operational budget as reflected in the different SEGs.

The budgetary allocation of \$100,000 for upgrade works at Galoa Hatchery and the Naduruloulou Research Stations, will enable the Ministry to provide the supply of shrimp and prawn post larvae, along with tilapia fry which is required by Fiji's aquaculture farmers.

The increase in the provision for freshwater aquaculture of \$400,000 will increase farm productivity through the extension services, focusing on training and research.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, capacity building is critical to ensure that farmers are sustainable. Dedicated training programmes on best practice farm methodologies and financial literacy will be delivered in the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through a governance structure of cluster-based farming associations, the Ministry of Fisheries in partnership with the farmers, will benefit from the economies of scale and path to market initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, food security, import substitution, climate change adaptation and economic development are all key benefits of aquaculture and, therefore, the Ministry appreciates and supports the budget allocation for this programme.

For Coastal Fisheries, Mr Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 fiscal envelope for fisheries also provides for initiatives and programmes to support our rural, coastal and maritime communities. The Ministry currently provides fishing communities with ice through 24 ice plants from far east as Lakeba,, to the far north as Rotuma.

The additional \$569,000 for the Wainigadru and Koro Ice Plants under this year's budgetary provision will greatly assist these communities' contribution to the blue economy.

The supply of ice provides a longer shelf life for marine commodities and allows for proper fish handling. This helps the rural coastal and maritime communities to maximise the commercial value of fish that is being sold.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, additional ice plants broadens the scope of economic development support, which the Ministry now provides for our coastal, rural and maritime communities.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the production of seaweed provides an economic development opportunity for our rural coastal maritime communities. The budget allocation of \$259,000 allows the Ministry to provide farm startup materials, training, value adding, partnership and path to market initiatives for this valuable commodity. Another important contributor to our blue economy.

In Research and Development, Mr. Speaker, Sir, research, science and conservation are critical elements to sustaining, managing and protecting our fishery. Climate change and depleting fish stocks further underscores the importance of research for our ocean governance. Over the past years, there had been substantial work done in ensuring the sustainability of our coastal resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an allocation of \$300,000 will support the scientific work that the Ministry undertakes in Fisheries Research and Conservation. This work focusses on stock survey, fisheries impact assessments and non-detrimental findings which feed into informed decisions for ocean governance.

As we embark on the UN Decade of Ocean Science, the Ministry welcomes the \$300,000 allocation for Makogai Mariculture Research Centre. At Makogai, work will focus on specific finfish farming, in particular species of reef fish. The funds will support the reseedling programme of giant clams.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry continues its work in the Pearl Farm Oyster Development Programme. The \$295,000 allocated to this Programme will be used to procure spat collection materials, and will focus on identification of potential spat sites, conduct training on spat collection, harvesting and business models, such as community-based farming.

On Coastal Fisheries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocation of \$772,380 for Coastal Fisheries Development will greatly assist the Ministry's work in increasing the productivity of this sector. Through the footprint of nationwide fisheries service centre, the Ministry will continue to provide licensing and advisory services for fishing communities which includes the establishment of fishermen associations, technical advice, and training on Fish Aggregate Devices (FAD) deployment, equipment maintenance, along with monitoring, control and surveillance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, monitoring, compliance and enforcement is another key pillar of work which allows the Ministry to sustain, manage and protect Fiji's fishery. The Ministry has a budget allocation of \$200,000 for this activity.

The Inshore Fisheries which was established in 2017 with the assistance of the New Zealand Government, will continue to coordinate the work to reduce and eliminate illegal and unsustainable fishing within our coastal areas.

Offshore Fisheries, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 fiscal Budget allows the Ministry to continue to effectively manage, protect and sustain our critical offshore fisheries resources. The Ministry will increase service delivery by ensuring that there is:

1. an amendment to the 2014 Offshore Fisheries Management Regulation;
2. development of an updated Tuna Management Plan; and
3. use the innovative technology to improve the implementation of sustainable measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, I would like to have some discussions on the issue raised by the Opposition. I am pretty sure that the Honourable Minister for Economy will dwell on it further when he has his Right of Reply.

The Honourable Jale stated the standard of franchise ships. Franchise ships are run by commercial companies. In fact, in this Budget, VAT has been removed on the purchase of vessels. So, it basically relies on supply and demand. They provide a good environment, the commercial vessel companies will be able to buy new ships and their service will improve. Of course, Government is doing everything it can to assist in the Franchise Scheme.

On tax for low income earners, I want to explain to the Honourable Members of the Opposition that workers are not taxed until they reach the threshold of \$30,000. So, I do not understand what they are trying to complain about.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- They are complaining about contracts, contracts has always existed. In private businesses, everyone is contracted. CEOs are contracted and managers are contracted. In the Military, and I think the Honourable Leader of Opposition will support me, every member of the Military is contracted. But that does not deny them access to bank loans. Never! The Honourable Leader of the Opposition said that he had applied for a loan about 34 years ago.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Gavoka said that FijiFirst is pro-rich, but on another tone he goes on his political campaign in his field and said, "Listen, if you come with us, we will look after you."

Some Honourable Members of the Opposition and those who had contributed are clinging to the last straws that they can cling on, to make sense on a Budget that they thought would fail miserably. They should support what is good. They should provide alternatives, they should go Head by Head, Ministry by Ministry and suggest what they think should be a better balanced Budget.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- But just to stand up and try to cling to the very last straw for them to stay above water, is totally unfair and irresponsible.

They talked about garbage. When we debated before on the Budget, the Honourable Nawaikula said openly in this Parliament that fisheries does not provide anything to the Government coffers. He said it is zero but the fact is, it is about 2.8 percent to 3 percent.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Well, that is not zero!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I plead with the Honourable Opposition Members to come to this Parliament with substantives and alternatives. Just do not stand up and create this phenomena that you have the floor and you can say whatever you want to say. Come up with facts, give it to us and we will accept it. Be the alternative Government and provide us with an alternative Budget. It must add up!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the allocated Budget for 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Ministry continues its commitment in playing the leadership role in our local communities and national economy through our sustainable management of Fiji's fisheries resources. In addition, the Ministry will work to develop a fit for purpose legislative and regulatory framework, to enable and support sustainable fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to have the best managed fisheries sector, the Ministry needs to excel across the whole operation, therefore, underpinned by our drive to increase service delivery and maximise operational and fiscal efficiency.

I commend and support the 2019-2020 Budget before this august House. I thank you for your indulgence, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON RATU T.N. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2019-2020 Budget. Let me begin by thanking the Honourable Minister for Economy and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for their presentation and the response to the Budget respectively.

First of all, I cannot ignore but praise my only God for His gracious love and for His divine power and guidance that enabled me to stand before you in this august House. And I, once again, wish to sincerely convey my appreciation to all the people of Fiji, at home and abroad, who have supported me all this while, in whatever ways that brought me to this achievement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I wish to invite the people of Fiji and my supporters, who are watching tis proceedings on television, listening to the radio and those who are online via mobile, to stay tuned and hear our responses on the 2019-2020 Budget.

When we talk about the Budget, we mean it is something to do about us, about you and me and about the people (human beings), our welfare, obligations and commitment, our resources, our lives and our services and more specifically, our wealth. I hope that you will bear with me in a few minutes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to begin on a good note by joining other Honourable Members in congratulating our National Sevens Team for their recent series of victories. They have made us very proud given that Vanua Levu is the home of Jerry Tuwai and Alosio Naduva.

I also bring the good wishes and regards to this House from the people of Macuata and offer to Eileen Cikamatana who despite our loss and Australia's gain proved her exceptional skills by scooping a gold medal in the Commonwealth weightlifting competition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been delegated to respond to this Budget on environment and waterways. What I note from the Budget of this particular Ministry is that there is a decrease of \$4.4 million in its operating budget and a further \$27.6 million cut in its capital expenditure in comparison to its last budget. The Ministry of Environment and Waterways has got its budget slashed to a total of \$34.4 million.

What does this decline mean? Let me sum it up as follows:

- Our environment will continue to be open to exploitation;
- There will be few drainage upgrading or development;
- Our river mouths will remain clogged without dredging;
- Our towns and cities will continue to suffer from flash flooding;
- Our farmers will continue to suffer from loss of livestock and crops;
- More lives and communities along the coastal areas and smaller islands will be in danger from effects of climate change as there is little to rehabilitate them with; and
- In case of natural disasters, the loss to the economy will be perilous.

Some of the glaring examples of these claims are:

- Destruction of land and waterways in Nawailevu, Bua;
- Extraction of sand at Votua in Ba and destruction of gravel beds along the Navua River;
- Depleting forest cover in Monasavu, Naitasiri;
- Carnage nature of Nawi Island in Savusavu; and
- The most recent one being the widely publicised activities of the Freesoul Company on Malolo Island.

Fiji's environmental challenges are simply misplaced. They are not so much resultant from climate change as much as by poor or bad developments dictated by greed and guided by the factor of loot at the expense of the resource owners, our national interest and our future.

This type of unprecedented and systematic robbery and destruction of the environment is now the new norm of life in the Pacific region resultant from poor and weak leadership dancing to the tune of bigger and richer nations, agencies and multi-national corporations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 131 of our Constitution vests enormous powers in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces for the security and well-being of the Fiji Islands and given this ongoing exploitation and loot of our natural resources and environment. We, the Opposition want a declaration from the military, as one of the custodians of our national interest to come out clear and loud to say whether or not that they support these poor development models or are in strict compliance with the Environment Management Act 2005.

This brings me to the issue of extraction of low value minerals around Fiji with an estimated value is said to be in billions of dollars. While expressing our appreciation to the Minister of Lands and Mineral Resources for the review of the royalty rates and in strict application of EIA regulations for grant of gravel licences, the landowners both native and freehold are dismayed at how gravel extraction firms have caused destruction to our rivers, streams and gravel beds along these rivers and streams. In a few cases, some of these firms have been able to even renew their licence to continue gravel extractions despite complaints from the landlords.

Food security, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is neatly and very ably tied up with poverty alleviation. They are also linked with the environment. In this context, we are dealing with what we produce as cultivators on the land and also what is given to us by nature on the land and in the water. Therefore, the

conservation and protection of our environment and waterways become more vital to our lives. An example of this is the wide variety of marine life as well as fruits and vegetables we have in Fiji to feed ourselves and keep our people free from hunger, disease and acute poverty.

However, this leisure is now going to be a short venture given how our natural environment has been degraded and destroyed by a series of corporate interests all over Fiji. People are already feeling the pinch of this with the sources of their food disturbed, poisoned, affected by low supply and having the trouble to walk miles to reach out for food as their nearby areas become polluted and taken over under the guise of development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these issues points down to one crude fact: the lack of will on the part of the authorities, in this case all – the Ministry of Environment, Police, local administrators and national leadership having failed miserably to enforce the prescriptions made by the law, particularly the Environment Management Act 2005. The reduced budgetary allocation and the already demoralized human resource at the Ministry of Environment is now going to worsen the situation further.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now speak on the Ministry of Waterways. I wish to make references to the two legal responsibilities that comes under the Ministry of Waterways which are the Drainage Act and the Irrigation Act. They are both out-dated and needs to be reviewed with our own needs and desires and in line with the UN Agenda 2030 pertaining to sustainable development of water resources, waterways and challenges posed by climate change. Therefore, it would be ideal to incorporate both these Acts as one uniformed code of law while updating the same.

Fiji's waterways, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have a twin-pronged problem:

1. Sustainable use of water as a resource; and
2. Draining out surface water to avoid clogging and flooding.

Insofar as the management of our water resources are concerned, we are glad to have the Honourable Minister for Waterways make more than one Ministerial Statement here on the floor of this House outlining the policies and programmes of this new Ministry.

However, what we are worried about is that there is a lot of talk but little action. We were quiet on this aspect for a while, given that it is a new ministry to allow the pace of time for the new Minister and the Ministry to settle down and it is now two years; that is sufficient to begin the job. How can we do that when there is no fund? The fund is not sufficient.

Tragically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work of the Ministry of Waterways is now eclipsed by reduced funding. This will mean:

- Our drainage systems will remain clogged and more flash flooding;
- Loss of life and property during flash flooding resulting from poor drainage;
- Lack of water resource development;
- Rivers engineering to remain a major problem;
- Continued erosion of coastal land areas exposing communities to the vulnerability of being washed away; and
- Possible scarcity of low value minerals in some parts of Fiji for the building industry giving a hike in the price of the same.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to now speak on how vulnerable our communities have become to lose their land, homes, source of food and traditional areas by the effects of both climate and environmental exploitation. That is explained no better than the revealing statistics in the National

Census Report, keeping in mind the national geo-demographic movement from the rural and maritime areas creating an urban influx and those on the margins of the economy and reeling from the effects of climate change and environmental exploitation still out there suffering from an unknown fate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising and respecting the noble objectives of the Green Fund, our investment in the Fund as well as our very own Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL) Funding, the guiding ideal principle in this respect is to rehabilitate communities affected by climate change and environmental exploitation. The outline of the Green Fund and its models in various countries state turning brown areas into green areas and yet we continue to deal with communities in places like Nawailevu in Bua where there has been no rehabilitation or mitigation works and the lives of the people in such communities have gone worse from being bad.

The Ministry of Waterways may do well in upgrading the Naboro Landfill which we welcome as a timely action but at the same time, the Opposition would like to question Government why there is no provision to upgrade or relocate the Lautoka Rubbish Dump and put in place measures to curb and control the occasional fire breaks at that site.

The next issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is drainage and flash-flooding resulting from drainage issues. Fiji's altered weather pattern now brings us abundance of rainfall which may soon be followed by drought but the rain refuses to ebb away for now and is likely to continue for some time into the future. Given that, there is a dire need for regular maintenance and development of upgrading of our drainage system in towns and cities as well as in the rural communities.

Recent experiences, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has shown that most incidents of flash flooding in our densely populated areas and rural communities are a direct result of drainage clogging, blocked water outlets and partially due to un-dredged rivers or streams which cannot take the large volume of water and instead turns back, flooding the plains along them.

In the case of Rakiraki, the district has experienced almost 20 floods. Ba and Nadi are a little behind that number and we are now even having flooding in areas like Lomolomo, Buabua and Vitogo in Lautoka. Why? It is because of poor drainage and a lack of river dredging. The condition in Sigatoka is no better but luckily the area did not experience much rain or it would have been another worse hit area in the West.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year during Easter and this year again, as if to mark its anniversary, the Yaladro Flats in Tavua was reeling under unprecedented flooding from the Tavua River. The reason how it came to that was that the river bed is now higher than the flats and if the river is not dredged, what has been happening in Rakiraki is highly likely to be the case in Tavua soon.

In Labasa, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Qawa and Labasa Rivers needs regular dredging or diversion away from the town as we are thinking about developing a by-pass highway from ends and sides of Labasa Town. The river is not only a threat to the economic activities in the town but is fast becoming a health hazard given how polluted it has become because of lack of EIA compliance of many activities taking place along its banks.

This is made worse by illegal gravel extractions and damages caused to the Navua River banks by companies who do not own land there but have already imposed themselves by encroaching upon other properties. This has not only hurt the environment but prospects of eco-tourism which is an emerging industry in the district.

The failure of the FijiFirst Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by lame duck excuse of the review of the local government to dilly delay the Local Government Elections is one of the main reasons why our

towns and cities such as Suva and Nasinu are suffering from poor drainage and road conditions. The Government has to take responsibility of the failure of its town administrations where poor drainage results in flash flooding then power and water cuts, bringing the lives of our people to a standstill. This is your real version of economic boom.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House has heard more than once the plight of the rural communities and farmers pertaining to the developments, upgrading and maintenance of farm roads and drainage systems. The failure in the last one decade and now with reduced budgetary allocation, this problem is likely to exist and get even worse. There were few communities who were lucky to get their roads and drainage done on the eve of the elections last year while others are now waiting for the next election, not to get the maintenance work done but to boot this dictatorship out of power for its failures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is always gratifying to note when this Government built on the pillars of one-upmanship talks about Public Private Partnership to beautify our towns and cities. By making that pronouncement in the budget, the Government has itself proved a number of things.

Firstly, how ugly and dirty our towns and cities have become in the last one decade under its appointed administrations. Secondly, it is an admission that Government cannot do everything on its own and needs the private sector to join the crusade. Thirdly, the importance of flora is not only about beautifying our communities but being an important element in the food production which is on the decline across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few words on the much-publicised Northern Division Development. I have the following issues to highlight urging the Government to action the same, failing which the intent Northern Division Development Plan is likely to remain a distant dream.

Tarsealing of the major roads linking Labasa to Wainikoro, Dogotuki, Saqani, Vaturova meeting Savusavu road: The last tarseal project on the road was way back in the mid-1990s and since then, the maintenance and repair done on gravel roads continuously every year with excessive funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we propose the Government initiate plan for tarsealing every year on these gravel roads in Vanua Levu as well as the other roads in the country. This would minimise cost on road works, then and again the earth works on road leads to soil erosion during heavy rain whereby the soil washed away to the rivers and ocean is a threat to the environment.

Planning and implementing resources and measures to gradually develop Wainikoro as a full-fledged town with the availability of basic services: Currently, the Government facilities available at Wainikoro are the Health Services, Police Station, Agriculture Station, Fishing, Cooperative, Technical College and Nadogo Central College and the proposed Barefoot College.

These facilities serve the community of Nadogo, Namuka, Dogotuki, Udu in the Province of Macuata and the community of Saqani, Tawake and Vaturova in the Province of Cakaudrove.

Facilitating the *Walesi* outreach in the remote parts of Vanua Levu and its nearby islands after promotion last year before the Elections.

Only a few villages used *Walesi* in the remote areas of Vanua Levu. There is a need to include the communication network in the interior of Dogotuki, Udu Point and the island of Cikobia. The community of Savusavu-i-taqa in the interior of Wailevu are requesting for 'Mobile Tower', to provide network and with clear coverage. They are also requesting for water tanks to provide sufficient water for the village.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the need for the development of resources are needed for dependence of livelihood of the people upon the same which includes the protection or conservation, food security and adding value to the national economy. We have been promised alternative sources and alternative skills of fishing, but nothing has been done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support my argument, allow me to mention a few administrative matters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the reasons highlighted therein and all that have been presented against this Budget on the floor of this House, I strongly oppose this Budget and would not want to be a party to bring about an impending geo-political and social economic catastrophe which will paralyse our economy and render our people and nation bankrupt. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development, the Honourable Premila Kumar. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament: thank you for allowing me to take the floor to deliver my Statement in support of the 2019 – 2020 National Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years, this Government provided Fijians with what matters to them most.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is affordable and accessible education, water supply, electricity, better roads and bridges, improved connectivity and the ability to make a good living.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The National Budget for 2019–2020 builds on a plan for a stronger economy, an economy that benefits you, your family and your businesses. This Budget is a continuation of the Fijian Government's commitment to the Fijian people, one that encourages investment, enhancing innovation and drives productivity and living standards, more importantly, it is a responsible Budget.

The Honourable Minister for Economy has taken a balanced approach, carefully taking into consideration the status of global economy and its projections in the next few years, and how its impact will affect our national economy.

By keeping a pulse on international trends, he has smartly prepared a Budget that we have in front of us, a Budget that prepares us for an uncertain future but also seizes on the opportunities that come from these times of global uncertainty. The net effect is a budget that is balanced and prudent, one that despite consolidating, still has something for everyone, preserving our citizens' way of life and ensuring the many fruits of our progress remain intact.

The Budget has not affected the reduction of civil servants. It has not taken away any of the social wages being paid to our citizens. It has not raised personal and corporate tax. Our VAT remains the same and our capital work projects carry on.

In many nations, budgetary consolidation means real pain, so to achieve this responsible economic management while preserving these services, Fijians have come to enjoy and, in fact, growing with new programs and initiatives is truly an accomplishment we should be very proud of.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, taking responsibility is something this Government believes in. The Budget approach the Government machinery has been tightened. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not a random reduction, it is a thought-out plan for the next 12 months on what our priorities are and how we are going to implement this, while at the same time, focus remains on growing our economy and maintaining our decade of positive economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2019-2020 Budget is about collaboration and working smarter to perform better and more with less. This budget defines the way the civil servants are expected to work. The focus is on increasing productivity and multi-tasking, and not creating new positions for new projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian economy is projected to maintain a 2.7 percent growth in 2019, with a 3 percent growth for 2020. This is despite the IMF World Economic Outlook projecting a decline in growth in 2019 for 70 percent of the global economy. We cannot and should not take a stronger economy for granted. In the backdrop of the global economic slowdown, the pro-growth and pro-business support policies, smartly encapsulated in the 2019-2020 Budget comes at the right time.

These initiatives and measures will ensure that our long unbroken positive, economic growth continues. The bottom line remains that by helping our businesses grow, we are helping Fijian families earn a livelihood, have better standard of living and secure their and their children's future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, policy initiatives such as export, income deduction and the 100 percent tax deduction on FNPf paid by employers will increase confidence of businesses and help generate jobs.

The suite of tax incentives for our audio visual industry with increased investment and film production in Fiji, these productions have and will showcase the best of Fiji to the world.

Our tourism sector will benefit from the widening provisions of Short Life Investment Package (SLIP). These include building materials, furnishing fittings and equipment, room amenities, plus dining room furniture, kitchen utensils and so forth, and it also includes specialised water sports equipment.

In addition to duty exemption on capital equipment, plant and machinery is also provided with reduced duty and duty exemptions, depending upon whether their hotel comes under Short Life Investment Package (SLIP) or not. I was expecting my Shadow Minister to talk about some of the incentives being given in the hotel industry but I did not hear from him, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What he spoke about was the Environmental, Climate and Adaptation Levy (ECAL), increasing or making the Fiji destination more expensive, but let me come to that later on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on the five pillars of modality that the Honourable Minister for Economy laid out. My Ministry will ably contribute towards sustaining the Bainimarama Boom. Through our programmes and initiatives, we will ensure that the Ministries:

- live within their means by working smarter;
- empower young Fijians by giving them relevant support, spur technology and innovation through incentivising research and development, which is our new programme called RISE;
- build a consistent and clear business environment that invokes confidence and investment;

- keep backing businesses to invest and create more jobs, especially micro, small and medium-size businesses; and
- continue the sustainable development of our tourism industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the perspective of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, I welcome the development of a dedicated Budget to further support our Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) which forms the backbone of our society. MSMEs comprise approximately 18 percent of our GDP which equates to \$2.3 billion accounts for 97 percent of total business establishment and provide employment to 36 percent of our workforce or 60 percent if the informal sector is included.

The establishment of a Central Coordinating Unit will see MSME programmes better coordinated across Government. Collecting, sharing and learning from data across the whole of Government will ensure improved coverage and more efficient use of our resources. In doing so, we will equip Fijians with lifelong business skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also welcome the development of a National Youth Awards event in the next financial year. It will shine a spotlight on the achievements of young Fijians throughout our country and this will definitely encourage our younger generations to strive for excellence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government will continue to drive reforms that will improve the ease of doing business in Fiji. In conjunction with the Singaporean Government, work will continue on streamlining and re-designing processes to improve efficiency by 40 percent. In addition, we will be taking the construction permit approval processes entirely online with extensive work scheduled in the next financial year, to prepare for the transition.

I know some criticisms were made as to why the Government is working with the Singapore team, it is pretty obvious, why we are working with them? We want to work with the best. They were No. 1 when you came to ease of doing business so we would like to learn from them and improve our ease of business indices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note that the 2019-2020 Budget has made provisions for tax incentives, for diversification and establishment of new businesses, such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, local film-making, warehousing and storage facilities, retirement villages and aged care facilities, including waste recycling businesses. These will create additional jobs and assist in the growth of the economy. It should be noted that to attract more Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) services, qualifying criteria for tax incentives have been removed, such as restriction on employment number and export level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Trade Commissions in China, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and North America will successfully market Fiji as an investment and tourism destination and also make headway for Fijian products in those markets. Fiji will capitalise on opportunities available in the Indian market by establishing a Trade Commission in India. This is an economy that the World Bank forecasts as the fastest growing major economy in the world. This also brings potential to grow exports with enhanced access through Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tourism is the lifeblood of the Fijian economy contributing to more than 30 percent of the GDP. Visitor arrivals have continued on an upward trajectory with a 3.3 percent increase, compared to the previous year. Earnings reached a record of \$2 billion in 2018, a 4.5 percent increase from 2017. The visitor arrivals for the first four months of this year recorded a 5.8 percent increase, compared to the same period last year. In this quarter, we have recorded earnings of \$366.6 million, improving on the \$358.2 million for the same period last year.

Through these smart investments and initiatives of the Government, we are getting better returns and high yield. So, unfortunately, I cannot take the recommendation or the ideas suggested by the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He wants us to follow Maldives.

Maldives is not a very good example, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is one country where they may have reached a million tourists, but the problem is the level of environmental destruction in their country, including biodiversity, coral destruction, waste management and sewerage treatment is a huge problem for that country. I would recommend that he should be reading some of the FAO report on Maldives, and that would be one country that we will not touch, and we will not even go near it. And why should we? Because our numbers are going up, despite ECAL, our numbers are still going up and it is not alarming that we should be looking at our taxes again.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Tourism Fiji will maintain its marketing activities with a more focused approach with the continuation of the marketing budget at the same level. Tourism Fiji will continue to promote Fiji to new and emerging sourced regions whilst deepening our reach in traditional market. Any improvement in our air transport brings enormous benefits for our trade in tourism. The new financial year will see the delivery of two A350s by Fiji Airways, thereby, giving the Fijian Tourism Industry a bigger footprint and a world class travel experience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, moving to the Ministry of Local Government, a sum of \$12.6 million has been allocated towards the preparatory and completion of capital works projects, unlike in the past, where ratepayers had to pay special rates for capital projects. Such funding is a genuine commitment by the Government in making towns and cities a more liveable place for all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the projects that are expected to be completed in 2019-2020 financial year are Namaka, Rakiraki and Laqere markets, swimming pool in Lautoka, Govind Park Stadium in Ba, construction of rest room in Korovou, upgrade of Children's Park in Labasa and Nasinu, and construction of municipal mini-markets in Nakasi, Mead Road and RB CenterPoint in Suva and Viam PillayRoad in Lautoka. The construction work will commence for improvement of ventilation and lighting at Lautoka Market, and installation of floodlights at Churchill Park.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, preparatory work plan for 2019-2020 also include relocation of the market and bus stand in Sigatoka and Labasa; construction of a multipurpose court in Davuilevu and Nadi; sports stadium in Valelevu; new bus station in Rakiraki and Nasinu; new swimming pool in Nasinu; and new market in Lami. An allocation of \$3 million has been made to support the collection of rubbish from informal settlements and areas previously managed by the Rural Local Authorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government has embarked on an ambitious urban planning programme to support urban design protocols. With the expertise from Singapore, the work is expected to be completed during the next financial year.

Master plans will be used for the purpose of considering developments application so gone are the days where one had to apply for rezoning, assist investors in understanding in land use plan for the respective urban centres and upgrade open spaces and streets, including beautification programme based on scheme statements. New master plans will be finalised for the greater Suva area, Lautoka City and Nadi Town.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, affordable housing is a priority for this Government. The Ministry of Housing and Community Development was established as a separate Ministry in the current financial year, to achieve Government's vision of increasing home ownership across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government aims to increase affordable and quality housing to low middle income household and people living in informal settlements and is keen to explore a well-structured solution.

The Government has introduced a number of innovative measures by engaging with Non-Government Organisations, multilateral financial institutions, development partners and private sector. The Government recently signed a Financial Advisory Service Agreement with IFC to assist in the design and implementation of housing project.

Six sites have been identified and these sites are Davuilevu, Nepani, Wainibuku, Raiwaqa, Tavakubu and Tavua in the Central and the Western Divisions. And at the moment, these sites are being planned to develop green and climate resilient housing units for low middle income households in Fiji with private sector participation. The preliminary reports from IFC are expected as early as August this year with the total process to be completed within 18 months to 24 months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Koroipta Model Town Charitable Trust will receive funding assistance of \$2 million in this new financial year to extend their housing programme to 140 vulnerable families. These include widows, abandoned families, mentally ill and disabled. The Government assisted in acquisition of land and provision of electricity for this settlement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the multiple taxing benefits extended to encourage the private sector investments into housing to increase both house stocks and rental homes in the market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the new financial year over 600 households will have access to home and land through first home and first land purchase programmes. This will be an increase from the 456 households assisted this financial year. The programmes focussing towards social housing assistance and housing for vulnerable families and people with disabilities will continue through various stakeholders including HART, Habitat for Humanity and Public Rental Board. My Ministry will continue monitoring these programmes to ensure effective use of these grants for intended purposes.

The Rural Housing Assistance to those living in village boundaries in the rural and maritime areas will continue. My Ministry will review processes relating to upgrading of informal settlements to reduce time and to remove obstacles. A Housing Advisor will be engaged to strengthen the legal and operational framework, and this is only happening because the New Zealand Government is assisting us in getting the right person for this particular assignment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the new financial year, 183 households in Ledusasa and Cuvu settlements will receive their targets. Civil works for Waidamudamu will be completed, formalising land tenure for another 240 households. And engineering plans will be completed for Caubati Stage 2 and Stage 3, Wakanisila Field 4, Sakoca, Tavela, Tore and Quuia. An additional 1,187 households will benefit from this development project. My Ministry will also continue acquiring more development leases and undertake initial feasibility studies in developing green field sites.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said from the start this Budget is about our future. A future we want to secure against challenges posed by the global economic downturn. This Budget provides the much needed confidence in the country's economy. It paves the way for bigger successes for our businesses and for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly support the 2019-2020 National Budget. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Please, I want all Honourable Cabinet Ministers to listen to this because I know I am correct. If you think I am not correct you can put your hands up. The problem that we have is this, we have a serious cash flow problem or liquidity problem. And by liquidity, I mean cash in the pocket.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAIWAKULA.- Government does not have the money and the reason is that over the years there have been reckless and careless spending by the Government, by the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Attorney-General because you do not have a say there. They are the ones that decide.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAIWAKULA.- So, they have been reckless and careless spending. I call it corruption; corruptive spending.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. N. NAIWAKULA.- And this has caught up with us, this is catching up with us, and it is now making a landfall by this Budget that we have, which is forcing us to cut expenditures on every sector from capital right up even to wages. That problem is caused by excessive careless spending.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, you agreed with me. I said if you do not agree you put your hands up; no one put his hands up so you agree with me. And if you disagree with me you tell me how much money you have in the bank; you have nothing.

The Ministry of Education, you know in the rural areas those who are transporting children have not being paid for some months now. Some schools are still waiting for their allocation. Why? Because there is no money.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAIWAKULA.- So, you all do not have money, and you are crawling to this Parliament on all fours begging for the money so that we can approve this for that cash injection. That is where we find ourselves. We want that money but you cannot get that cash injection unless we cut expenditures; so it has been forced upon us. You agree with me, you know you may not have credit in your account. What do you have? Nothing! That is the serious situation that we face ourselves here now.

Honourable Koroilavesau asked what our alternative budget is. First, we will sack the Honourable Prime Minister and also sack the Honourable Attorney-General for careless spending. Yes, because they are the cause of our problem now. We will have to put them out, then we will have to rearrange your contribution according to your contribution to the GDP. Now, what does that mean? It means Honourable Premila because they contribute most will move up, will have the greatest share of the Budget. Ministry of Agriculture will be shifted even further down because we trusted you with 11 percent or 12 percent of GDP some years ago, but you have gone down. So, you are useless, we will put you away.

Same as Ministry of Fisheries and Ministry of Forestry. So, that is our alternative budget. We sack those two for over spending, careless and reckless spending. They are the reason why we are here. They are the reason why we have this problem. We have to cut expenditures right across the board so that you can qualify to take out the loan. If not, nothing. So, that is our alternative you were asking- one and two out, overspending, careless.

Ministry of Infrastructure you are going further back. We trusted you last year, \$136 million and you have done it for us you have slashed their allocation this year to 46 percent because they cannot fix the potholes. Even the potholes you cannot do it. I asked you if you disagree put your hands up so there is no hands up, you agree entirely. That is the sorry situation that we now find ourselves in and that is what the Budget documents are telling us.

You have to do this. It is not a positive, it is a defensive. We have been driven back in their defence to try to cut back so that we can get a loan. It is very, very sorry. Where is the boom in that? It is not a boom. The Honourable Prime Minister said boom is to clean up but they have cleaned up all our money. So, it is the boom or kadam, just like the kite, when the kite kadam it falls down. So, we fall down so we face this drastic situation.

Mr. Speaker, that is the sad situation for our economy. You know to continue as usual the Honourable Attorney-General Budget presentation on Friday, 7th June was eloquent and well expressed with confidence. Yes, we do not take that away from him. But after relating what he said to the Budget documents which are here right in front of us – the Budget Supplement and also the Budget Kit that was distributed throughout by *Fiji Sun*, as well as after taking advice from the economic experts, I am afraid and sorry to say that there was a lot of deception in that presentation.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, he deceived us, he deceived you too.

So the eloquence and confidence appeared to me to have been done purposely to hide the true nature of our economic hopelessness, and I am angered as well that some slanted media outlet, notably the *Fiji Sun* and *FBC*, and some shadowy experts and academics are supporting the Honourable Attorney-General's deception.

The *Fiji Sun* on Saturday, 8th June, 2019, posted, and I quote: “Bainimarama Boom and a productive Fiji after straight eight years of economic growth.” One FNU Academic, his name is Professor Rohit Kishore said and I quote: “What we have is a well-considered smart Budget.”

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, it is not! You agree. You look at the money every day, tell us, what is your bank account in your Ministry?

So, I am angry, Mr. Speaker, because all of us in this august House, as well as the media and, of course, all academics and economic experts know the truth about the hopelessness of our economic situation. And yet, some of these very people that the public rely on for objectivity are paddling the deception that is coming out from the Honourable Attorney-General, right from the floor of this House.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You listen! You want money or what?

One month before this Budget, I was informed by the very people who prepared the Budget documents, that Fiji was facing a very serious cashflow problem. They told me that there was \$200 million in approved LPOs just sitting idly in the Ministry of Economy because there was no money.

\$106 million was then owed to road contractors, who were sent threatening to pull out their machines and \$400 million was needed to be located from somewhere to pay Government salaries.

One week before the Budget, I was told again by the same people that the Ministry of Economy had issued a moratorium or sealing of \$30,000 per day. You all know that! This was distributed to you, "Do not spend more than \$30,000 because we have nothing in the pocket."

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And then the debt to GDP ratio was hovering at 53 percent, and that there must be massive budget cutbacks in order that we can borrow money to fund Government projects next year. So these people told me to expect massive Budget cutbacks for those reasons, this has been true. Just look at your documents there, what do you see? Nearly \$1 billion in cuts - 17 percent reduction, \$806 million.

So the sad reality is that, the Government has literally come crawling here to this House and all four walls of this Parliament, asking for the mandate, because there is no money and it badly needed parliamentary mandate for a massive cash injection.

At the same time, we cannot get that unless we get the cuts. The Budget experts recommend and we have seen here that we have to support by making that massive cutback to qualify us to borrow fund for Government's operation next year with a deficit. You can only get that deficit if you have all these massive cutbacks and we see now.

It is very sad because it is just not limited to capital expenditures or even communication repairs, it goes right up to personnel. So you have to tell the public what you will do next year in relation to human resources and personnel. Who will you recruit? There is no provision for recruitment in the Budget. So what will happen to the USP graduates and the Nasinu graduates? What will happen?

Honourable Minister for Education, please explain to them because I do not see in your Budget provision for their recruitment, except Ministry of Health, yes. The Ministry of Health has provision there for doctors but others, I do not see it.

So you might be forced, either that or you are forced to recruit at very basic level, below salary. So that is the sad reality, Honourable Speaker, and if I use your own word, it is "unprecedented." But the sad thing is that, nowhere in his Budget Address, that the Honourable Attorney-General acknowledge this sad reality, nor acknowledge that he and his Government policy is the reason for our sad economic problems.

Mr. Speaker, you may ask, where is the Bainimarama economic boom in all these? Not arrears, a reduction of \$1 billion – that is a great impact on our economy. It rubs out totally that 10 years that you are talking about.

The so-called boom in my view is a pie in the sky and possibly brought into feature in the Honourable Attorney-General's speech to cover up and make us forget our hopeless situation. But no! You cannot hide the truth.

The sad truth is that, this Government has been mismanaging the public purse with bad economic policies. In other words, economic growth is meaningless, if there is a big hole in your pocket where all our hard earned cash is being drained out. That is what has been happening to us.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the consequences of these Budget cuts before I talk about the reasons. The Budget documents themselves are confirming to me what the Government Officials had warned last week but which the Honourable Attorney-General has been totally silent about in his Budget presentation. It is that the Government is facing a serious cash flow or liquidity problem. By liquidity, I do not mean bank liquidity, I mean cash at hand. There is no cash out there in all Departments, nothing!

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, *dinau!* *Dinau!*

You know those contractors on the road have not been paid. They were ready to pull-out, but because they think about you, they think about their children, they are doing their work for *dinau* (debt). You are owing to the people. Be fair! Let us be truthful about this.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not all made up, it is written there. Look at the Budget, what does it say \$1 billion cutback. And we cannot get any loan to fund the Government operations next year, unless you make these massive cutbacks, and that is happening right in front of you. Open up your book to see it. So we have all seen and it is now the talk of the town and the nation that merely \$1 billion has been slashed and a tough cutback from last year's Budget of \$4.6 billion in expenditures.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Savings!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You make me laugh. That is not savings, we are forced into this. We have been pushed into that because of the Honourable Prime Minister. Too much spending - here, there, Home Care. You know in the Home Care, even those people from Vanua Levu travelled by bus to Nadi and got their share of \$1,000 because it was so loose. It was not thought-out. So many chiefs were distributed with a boat and an outboard motor, it all counts up.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- They're watching you on TV.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, they watch me on TV but we have to be responsible, that is my point.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So, what is serious? \$1 billion has been slashed. So this massive cutback is 17 percent of last year's allocation or \$809 million

And what is serious and sad is the fact that no sector is spared, including our priority areas of education, health, agriculture, infrastructure and transport. Infrastructure has been hit the most, 46 percent cut. I am not sure how they will repair the potholes. Even with the \$135 million last year, they cannot repair the potholes. Now, with that much, there is no hope.

The infrastructure and transport budget has been slashed by \$76 million or 46 percent. Education has been slashed by....

(Honourable Member interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, I laugh at you.

How can you operate? Now, let the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure tell this House, whether he is happy with that. How can he fix our roads with half his Budget cut? What will he do?

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are calling it savings.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Tell me how?

Education has been slashed by \$48.3 million. Is Honourable Minister for Education happy with that? 9.4 percent cuts.

Already, we do not have quality education, not enough teachers, underpaid.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Who's underpaid?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The teachers, lack of work morale. I can tell you that most who are resigning now are teachers...

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ...because they cannot handle your dictatorship. They would rather work in a Service Station or somewhere.

Agriculture has been slashed by 21 percent. Honourable Dr. Reddy, are you happy with that?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No problem, I'm happy.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Sugar, \$25 million every time that was there, has been totally lost. Now, there is only \$2 million left, so there is a total deduction of \$23 million.

Honourable Speaker, let me ask this question to the Honourable Ministers on the other side of the House, are you happy with this sad situation of massive cutbacks? Where do you think the Bainimarama Boom is in all these? Can you see it inside there, I do not see the boom there?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I cannot see the boom there. It will fall out into the pond because of the overspending, and you are still crying out boom. Boom, boom, boom! It is doom, it is kaboom.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, I want to demand all Honourable Ministers on the other side to tell the public, especially the Government employees under them, what will they do as a consequence, especially on their job security? Will you be including next year? Will you be promoting next year with this boom? May be that boom will wash things out.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Or maybe, Honourable Speaker, if I should ask them in another way, who is the cause of this problem?

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- You are!

The answer I know, you will say and I believe so, and you will all point your fingers to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General because you do not make any decision on the money, they make the decision on the money, and they are the reason.

And also they did not listen to your good advice. If they had listened to your good advice, you would not be in this problem.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, because they are deciding for you, you are their children.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, the serious thing about this massive Budget cutback is that, it is not limited to capital projects or special projects or even maintenance and operations or travelling communications. No! It cut backs on everything, even the most serious of all, which is staff and wage earners allocations.

Accordingly, there is a moratorium on staff budget allocation. The only exception, of course, that I have said is the Ministry of Health. They are saying that only the Honourable Minister for Health can recruit doctors next year, others you have to tighten your belt here, tighten it here and tighten it down there. There is nowhere to move, put a rope here and go hang yourself.

(Laughter)

You can laugh, but that is where we are now in this Budget.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are a joke! You have been overspending and overspending. And where have you left us?

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Nothing! Government with no money, no *ghare*!

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, I went around asking economic experts, why is it that six months before this Budget, our country is suffering serious cash flow and liquidity problem? And the answer I am told is because directly, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General have careless spending. And let me just summarise all of these.

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- \$230 million was estimated to buy votes last year. The Government had to borrow taxpayers' money and were used for road shows, press and all activities desired to buy votes including the purchase of outboard motors. Mr. Speaker, \$45 million was wasted on golf sponsorship that benefitted no one, \$12 million so far has been used to bring Super Rugby teams from overseas to come and play here, \$65 million was used for home care alone, \$30 million for agriculture home care....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. – It is not your father's money. What do you think? That is the public's money, which is my money. I pay tax.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- These are examples of reckless spending and there are many others, the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mahendra Reddy, please sit down. I will handle this.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- With all these

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the bell has already rung twice so I do not know whether you noticed that.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I stood up for the other reason. The Honourable Member said, “this is not your father’s money”.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are having a budget debate here and we will have the debate as we should have it. I will give the floor to the next speaker. Thank you Honourable Nawaikula. Honourable Alipate Nagata, you have the floor.

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament. I rise to add my voice in support of the motion before the House and congratulate the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for a responsible and forward looking Budget.

This Budget is genuinely entrenched in the FijiFirst Government’s firm belief that young people are of our future and most precious asset. We believe that young people are very important to our national agenda and to the development of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Ministry of Economy for the budgetary allocation and I would like to state in this Parliament that we will ensure our mandated duties are carried out well and that we will rise above expectation because we are strong and a united team.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS- Hear, hear!

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is sad that we hear a lot of racial undertones, we need unity, the youths need unity, we are all Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS- Hear, hear!

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to congratulate the boys for their winning the Sevens Series Title. When the Sevens Team won, it was also because they were united. When the winning try was scored, nobody for a second thought about anything other than Fiji. We are the champions, all of us as Fijians. Just like FijiFirst, the Ministry of Youth and Sports also believes in a strong and united team.

The core programmes coordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports are centred on youth. We enable this through advisory, empowerment and capacity building. This includes specific skills training and the development of sports and sporting infrastructure through the provision of grants to the Fiji National Sports Commission and national sporting organisations.

We also facilitate the provision of basic sports equipment and the development of rural playing fields. The Ministry focuses on these developments to ensure that our youths are empowered and have access to good sporting infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Youth and Sports four main initiatives in the 2019-2020 Budget are:

- supportive community based capacity building;
- promoting youth leadership;
- promoting the development of sports at all levels; and
- expanding access to sporting to sporting infrastructure for the Fijian people to encourage healthier living.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under our community based capacity building initiatives, the Ministry of Youth and Sports core responsibilities are:

- establishment of a policy environment that provides strategic support systems;
- initiatives for personal development;
- character building;
- sports policy implementation; and
- community based youth-led programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, training is run in close co-ordination with other Ministries particularly the Ministries of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forests and iTaukei Affairs and is aiming at empowering young people to be productive members of the community and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to venture into income earning opportunities. Such training programmes re-affirm the FijiFirst Government's position to reach the unreached and also ensures that our rural based youth or to share the same opportunities that urban counterparts have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the promotion of youth leadership is an important aspect of the Ministry's empowerment programme. In promoting the programme, the Ministry has engaged selected youth from across the country to enter into dialogue through the National Youth Conference where we listen to what young Fijians want, the Duke of Edinburgh International Awards Programme where each individual undergoes development on life skills and character development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in promoting youth leadership as one of the initiatives in the 2019-2020 Budget, an allocation of \$240,000 has also been set aside for the Youth Workers Pilot Project. This Project will engage district youth workers who will work directly with Fijian communities to assess areas for youth development through a grassroots approach.

The Youth Workers main role is to support the operation and organisation of youth and sports clubs and related activities in communities. This is done thorough capacity building, development skills, entrepreneurship and sports outreach programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the youth workers in place through this allocation, young Fijians will have a better chance of involving themselves with relevant initiatives ensuring meaningful participation and developing ownership. The youth workers will also broaden their interactions with young Fijians in our respective communities as they will be community-based, allowing more engagement with schools and university students providing guidance and support for them or enabling them to become entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the community based capacity building initiatives in the 2019-2020 Budget is the \$20,000 allocated to the review of the Fiji National Youth Band. This initiative will improve the accreditation and earning potential of the programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$280,000 is also allocated for the members of the National Youth Band (NYB) to get paid on a full time basis and for expenses. The same members can be utilised as a tool of encouragement for current students. It also allows for trainees within the programme to gain much needed experience in the field of music and contemporary arts.

We can proudly say that the Ministry has indeed created pathways for many of our NYB Trainees; 62 trainees became Physical Education, Music and Arts teachers in various schools around the country and two made it to the Fiji National University where one became a Music Teacher and another the Director of Music, 39 of the NYB Trainees were recruited into the Army and this does not

include the seven that joined the British Army, 13 joined the Fiji Police Band and 11 in the Fiji Navy because of the skills they acquired through the NYB Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has an abundance of raw sports talents in urban, rural and maritime areas. Over the years, urban and rural youth and sportsmen and women who have access to sporting facilities were able to develop their sporting talents and excel to greater heights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rural sports field development programme is one of the initiatives provided by the FijiFirst Government for ensuring development and promotion of sports and physical activity at all levels. These involves the provision of proper sports fields and facilities for rural schools and communities to offer opportunities and encourage more active participation by all our citizens.

We thank the Ministry of Economy for allocating funds towards this important programme. For the Financial Year 2019-2020, the Ministry has approved the following sports grounds for upgrade;

1. Navutulevu, Serua;
2. Sawanikula, Naitasiri;
3. Naboro Primary School;
4. Waimakutu Secondary School, Namosi;
5. Lomolomo Public School, Ba;
6. Nawairuku Primary School, Ra and this includes a sports complex in Vunisea, Kadavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the sports grounds which have been upgraded are located in schools. School management will be in a better position to manage the upkeep of the ground, however Sir, this does not stop the surrounding communities from using the grounds as well since one of the fundamental reasons for the ground upgrades is the physical wellness of the students and the community members as a whole.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Economy for a Budget that focuses on youth and sports in a responsible manner to help us to continue to empower the future and most important asset of Fiji, our youth. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly support the 2019-2020 Budget. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Alipate Nagata for his contribution today. I now give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to address this august House. Before I make my reply to the Budget speech delivered by the Honourable Minister for Economy, Honourable Speaker, I would like to state at this juncture that the NFP and I do not quite share the views that was expressed earlier by my *naita*, the Honourable Kuridrani where he implied that the allocation for sugar might be racist, Honourable Speaker. Sugarcane farmers, Honourable Speaker, as you know include *iTaukei* and also Indo-Fijians from Fiji. So, I want to get that out of the way, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am reminded of four words used by the Honourable Minister for Economy in Parliament, while either presenting the National Budgets or his Right of Reply after Debate in this august Chamber both during the last term as well as the current term of Parliament. The four words are, “intellectual rigour” and “social amnesia”. They remind me, Honourable Speaker, of Cyndi Lauper’s famous hit, “*Time after Time*” from the 1980s. The second line in verse one is, and I quote, (but I will not sing this, Honourable Speaker), “Caught up in circles, confusion is nothing new”.

And I say that again Honourable Speaker, “Caught up in circles, confusion is nothing new.” This is what this “Boom for Whom Budget” is all about. It is about being caught up in circles, it is about confusion and tragically, it is about nothing new. Just a rehash of the old and a vain attempt to muddy the water with high-tech convolution that will not feed hungry mouths.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to quote from *Hansard*. The Honourable Minister for Economy’s concluding remarks from his Right of Reply on 11th July, 2017 to the 2017-2018 Budget where he said:

“The Fijian economy is forecasted to grow for eight consecutive years, and this Budget is expected to further boost business confidence, increase investments and provide the right impetus for higher growth, more inclusive and sustainable, more jobs for our people and our younger people and higher incomes. But the Opposition, unfortunately, is in complete denial.”

In July 2017, the Honourable Minister said the Opposition was in denial. Maybe, he meant the Opposition will be annihilated when it came to voting because Government dominated Parliament. Mr. Speaker, but almost two years later Government is up against a brick wall, both in terms of Parliamentary opposition, as well as the clear evasion of ideas, excelling only in successfully confusing taxpayers with pie-in-the-sky theories.

Quite simply, Honourable Speaker, this Budget is not about boosting business confidence, neither is it increasing investments and providing the right impetus for higher growth. It is not about more inclusive and sustainable jobs for our people and our younger people and it is not about higher incomes.

Honourable Speaker, let me say this, this Budget will not reduce the cost of living and I say that again, this Budget will not reduce the cost of living. This Budget does not provide incentives to increase wages and salaries based on Cost of Living Adjustment of ordinary workers as well as civil servants to sustain rising prices of all goods and services.

This Budget will not provide a decent and meaningful increase to the minimum wage to make it a living wage. This Budget is all about replicating the status quo of our sugar industry, which has suffered a 50 percent downturn in the last 12 years under the Bainimarama Boom. This Budget is also slowly but surely killing the goose that is laying the golden egg - our tourism industry - by continuing to impose 25 percent taxes that is outpricing the industry compared to lucrative Asian destinations, like Bali.

Mr. Speaker, essentially this Budget presents the question: A Boom for Whom? Honourable Speaker, at this point, I would just like to share a bit of my experience recently.

Mr. Speaker, last week, I was admitted at the CWM Hospital and I would like at this stage to thank the services of the staff of CWMH, particularly, Dr. Shahim, Dr. Rabukawaqa, the doctors, the nurses at ANE and particularly, at the Cardiac ICU. I am sure these doctors, nurses and health workers are struggling and working hard to try and get things together, to provide a health service that is good for our people, but it is very difficult for them in the environment which they work in, and I would like to share a little bit of that today with you, Honourable Speaker.

I sympathise with my good friend, the Honourable Minister for Health, who will be or he has inherited the system which I am going to dwell on a little bit in the House today. Mr. Speaker, you will not see this picture from where you are. This is a picture of a toilet door to the men’s washroom at the Acute Medical Ward where I was admitted previously 12 months ago. It shows a door that is open, actually tied with an IV tube to lock it, it has no lock and has a wood at the bottom to close the door. I just want to show you this picture now before I dwell on it, Honourable Speaker.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Oh, very sad.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, the picture relays a thousand words. I am just trying to show you today, at the Fiji's largest medical facility, the Colonial War Memorial Hospital, a wooden block is used as a stopper to prevent someone from locking him or herself in the washroom.

Honourable Speaker, most shamefully, an IV or intravenous tube is used as a lock to the door to what little privacy any user can get. This picture is emblematic of the sad state of our hospitals and goes on to service also our roads and even schools. It epitomizes the highfalutin values of common and equal citizenry, Honourable Speaker, now simply reduce it to a door that is hurriedly cobbled together with an IV tube.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to dwell on this most important issue in anyone's life and critical important element in any Government's delivery of smart and efficient healthcare.

Mr. Speaker, I have raised this matter twice before in this august Chamber, of the same door and the same bathroom. This is the third time I am showing you, Honourable Speaker. This is coming out of the Boom. It cannot fix a door for 16 months, you have to pull on the intravenous tube to have a decent shower, Honourable Minister, and you were a Minister then.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Look at the overall results.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Of course, but this is the right story I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, now it epitomises the high-falluting values of common and equal citizenry, now simply reduced it to a door ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- ... that is hurriedly cobbled together in an IV tube.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I have raised this matter twice as I have said, and I have not seen this broken bathroom door in the Acute Men's Medical Ward at Colonial War Memorial Hospital since February 2018 when I was hospitalised at that time. At that time it was only broken, Honourable Speaker, more than 16 months later, instead of being repaired, the door has further disintegrated. The door tragically heralds a gradual immersion into third world country status, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me show you the second picture, you cannot see from there but let me explain it to you. This is the roof of where the records at the hospitals are kept - on the ceiling, it is all busted, Honourable Speaker, someone boomed it and that is why it looks like this. There is the missing ceiling above the storage area of patients' records.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to stop there. We all have heard about the exploited boiler. On two occasions, I know last Friday, sewerage poured down again on the SOPD, as it did some weeks back, it close it, and they could not get the patients over to the theatre. The Children's Outpatient Ward is still closed.

Mr. Speaker, earlier on today, the Honourable Prime Minister said that he has a job to protect the people of Fiji. He also said earlier that he is sitting in the position of strength, to be able to do build

this. Honourable Speaker, how could he say that? The very basic rights of our sick people pulling a door to have a decent shower, when you are in no position to do it. It changes the whole things about our own rights and equal citizenry because people get left behind, the sick people.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about a boom, this essentially to me is the true state of what we should change.

Mr. Speaker, something is seriously wrong. If the Government cannot fix a broken door to replace a missing ceiling in the largest medical facility in the country, how on God's green earth can it fix an economy and improve the livelihoods of all our people?

How can it ensure that the rights and fundamental freedoms contained in the Bill of Rights of the 2013 Constitution are upheld at all times? Because from what we see, Honourable Speaker, this Government is spiralling more towards the limitations in the Bill of Rights rather than actually upholding these rights.

Mr. Speaker, Section 38(1) of the 2013 Constitution, the right to health states:

“The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realization of the right of every person to health, and to the conditions and facilities necessary to good health, and to health care services...”

Section 38(3) states:

“... if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available”.

Mr. Speaker, the State cannot claim not to have the resources to fix the door of the lone washroom used by the male patients in the Acute Medical Ward that has remained broken for the last 16 months.

The State has the resources to provide \$10 million to the ADB Conference. This Government has millions of dollars to lease top of the range vehicles from Vision Motors. This Government has the resources to pay the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers' salaries, perks and privileges that are thoroughly over-proportionate to the size of the national economy, but cannot fix the door.

Mr. Speaker, this Government cannot to pay a decent living national wage to our workers, cannot fix a washroom door that forces patients having shower to simultaneously hold on to an IV tube that prevents somebody else from barging in.

Can you imagine? Well that is probably a rhetorical question, Honourable Speaker, as the Government side does not have to imagine it because it is very likely that they enjoy healthcare treatment that we do not enjoy. But in that moment, an individual in a high state of vulnerability trying to heal from an illness, cannot even be guaranteed safety and dignity in that washroom - all because of a door, or lack thereof.

Mr. Speaker, nobody gets left behind and that is the right everyone in Fiji should really be getting.

Honourable Speaker, it would be helpful if the Honourable Minister could address some other observations of mine under his mandate:

1. Is the cafeteria area at CWM being used as a make-shift ward for patients because other spaces, including corridors, are over-crowded with beds?
2. Why is the Outpatients Department at the Children's Ward closed?
3. Why are cancer support to groups like WOWS (Walk On Walk Strong), Kids Fiji (WKF) a non-profit Charity Foundation for children with cancer in Fiji not being allocated funds to do the precious job that they do to support parents and families and the children suffering from cancer – the numbers of which are rising too.
4. Why has the Kidney Dialysis Treatment Subsidy been culled from \$3.5 million last year to a mere \$200,000 this year, and who from the Ministry will play God, Honourable Speaker, and decides who lives or dies from going without dialysis because of such a shameful allocation? Is it the Minister or will it be the Messiah?
5. What measures were taken to ensure the recent boiler fire did not spread to the fuel pump and oxygen line in close proximity?
6. Is the Ministry re-evaluating the safety requirements to ensure such an incident in the future does not result in catastrophic consequences?
7. Is HIV/AIDS medication stock in full supply now, especially for those needing “second line” medication?
8. Why are our dearly departed not being honoured in the mortuary, and in many instances, bodies lined up on the floor, creating doubly distressing situations for grieving families?

Mr. Speaker, the Public Private Partnership (PPP) for the new Ba Hospital was hailed a success by the Honourable Minister, but his statement early this year that the new hospital will start operations in June or July 2019, is one of the many instances of being ‘economical with the truth’, quite akin to his Budget, Honourable Speaker.

The hospital, we know, is going to be managed by Aspen that has partnered FNPF, albeit with 20 percent shares in the company created to manage Lautoka and Ba Hospitals. But we are reliably told that the Aspen has revealed that the hospital will not open in 2019. It will start operations in 2020 and there is no guarantee which part of 2020 that will be.

We further understand that Aspen could bill government to pay their costs of being a healthcare provider and there are indications that the PPP hospital will not provide specialised surgeries as claimed.

The Budget Estimates show that the Health Budget has been reduced by \$34.5 million, compared to the last financial year, despite moving the salaries of doctors from the Ministry of Civil Service allocation across this year.

As with all things, while the door analogy frames the reality of the optics, the numbers proof is in the pudding of the hyped-up narrative. The Estimates show the deeply dire picture that the public health services allocation for staffing has been slashed from \$3.095 million to about \$370,000. While the divisional allocations for staffing has also had major cuts, all in the millions.

The honourable Minister for Economy's pre-emptive rationalisation in the media that civil servants will have to multi-task and that the cuts were due to HR people padding the figures do not cut it. There will be job losses across the board, the numbers do not lie.

That, however, will be the cross that the honourable Minister for Health will have to bear. He has to defend his allocation, he will have to face distressed, anguished and maybe angry staff and taxpayers who will expect more than a doctor when clearly there are no funds for it. This is the reality of what the real economist mean when they say "reduced expenditure", Honourable Speaker. The ability of the Government to spend money to provide for services that people expect, is simply not there.

Mr. Speaker, the RFMF (Republic of Fiji Military Forces) has been reduced by \$7.3 million. I note that the staffing provisions in the RFMF have also been cut, except the naval and hydrography divisions, understandably because of the acquisition of *RFNS Volasiga* and *RFNS Savenaca* and the hydrography vessel from China; the *RFNS Kacau*.

The disconnect, however, is that the fuel and oil allocations for both activities do not match these acquisitions. Are we to expect from the story of these numbers that while the naval and hydrography vessels will be fully manned, it will not actually do much out there on the water because it is crippled by lack of fuel?

Mr. Speaker, the RFMF Commander publicly stated that the buildings which housed RFMF operations were very old and needed replacing. He said that this would be put on hold and hopefully they will be allocated resources when the economy is well again next year.

Mr. Speaker, the RFMF Commander's statement implied that the economy is not doing well and that is why their Budget has been reduced.

Mr. Speaker, this government decided to entrench RFMF's role as the ultimate guarantor of national security of all Fijians, under Section 131(2) of the 2013 Constitution. All ordinary Fijians should now ask whether the RFMF is capable of guaranteeing their peace and security after trimming its budget.

Mr. Speaker, I recall that less than 10 days before the General Election in November last year, the Honourable Prime Minister was asked on *FBC Radio Fiji One Talkback Show, na cava na GDP?* (What is GDP?) He replied, - GDP is debt - *na dinau*.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister must be commended for being forthright. He was absolutely right in saying, "GDP *na dinau*" because year in and year out, GDP has been inflated to borrow heavily and to show that debt level is less than 50 percent of GDP, and declining.

But we know from this Budget that this has been a cooking exercise, no doubt, perfected by 48 hours of level nine-ing at Suvavou House last December, to discuss strategies, like low hanging fruits, according to the Honourable Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, all this is happening under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister and under the Bainimarama Boom and his right hand, the honourable Attorney-General, who told the electorate last year that not voting for the Honourable Prime Minister would mean putting a dagger into their necks. It appears the dagger is slashing everyone's wallets, except those of Honourable Ministers, who freely help themselves to taxes, but fail to follow through in its basic obligations of Government services.

But the honourable Attorney-General, Honourable Speaker, and his leader still think they are the chosen ones on the face of an economy staggering towards a steep decline. My way or the highway, playing the blame game has been the hallmark of this Government for the last 12 years, but the smokescreen has disappeared. The state of our nation and the current patchwork by Government, and the doors hanging by IV tubes are all too visible to all.

This Budget must not further oppress and enslave the people of Fiji, and I oppose the 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill 2019. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his contribution to the debate.

Time moves on. Honourable Members, we will now suspend procedures for dinner, and this will be provided in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume in one hour. We adjourn for dinner.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.07 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.11 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate and I now call on the honourable Minister for Forests, the honourable Osea Naiqamu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of this House, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; I rise to respond to the 2019-2020 Budget Address that was presented on 7th June, 2019. Along with my colleagues on this side of the House, I wish to affirm the Ministry of Forests fullest support for the Budget.

I also wish to acknowledge and commend the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, particularly for developing a comprehensive and holistic Budget.

The Opposition and some so-called economists like to have us think that the Budget has been forced on Fiji. Mr. Speaker, it appears that their thinking is far from the realities of life. Devising a budget for the nation is not as simple as planning your family budget. The national budget can be a complex undertaking, given the scope and depth of issues to be considered, not only for the immediate period, but for the distant future.

Mr. Speaker, the 2019-2020 National Budget takes into account the ever-changing nature of global politics, technology, industry and markets, and then seeks to smartly reposition Fiji to be ready for the impact of such change, and whenever possible, to influence the outcome of such change. Lest the Opposition forgets that Fiji's unprecedented economic growth in the 10 consecutive years to date, has given rise through significant socio-economic development that has benefitted ordinary Fijians.

It is this consistent economic growth that has enabled Fiji to create employment opportunities for the thousands of young people pouring out of our secondary and tertiary institutions each year. It is this same growth that has enabled Fiji to expand our national infrastructure, build schools and health facilities and enabled ordinary Fijians to food on the table and meet their basic needs.

Mr. Speaker, it is this same growth that has enabled Fiji to take on prominent leadership roles in the international community in almost any field of endeavour - from presiding over the United Nations General Assembly, co-chairing the world's first Oceans Conference, being the first Small Island State to preside over the global climate movement or COP 23, being the current Chair of World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to even winning the Olympics Sevens Gold Medal and, as recent as last month, the World Rugby Sevens Series. All these achievements, among many others, Honourable Speaker, have been made possible through the strategic and smart financial positioning that only the FijiFirst Government could have done.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Fiji's Budgets have not only been focussed on building physical infrastructure to increase our capacity, they have also been designed to build capability that is now allowing our people to rise to greater heights. This is a strategic direction that may not have yet dawned on the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forests has been allocated a total budget of \$16.5 million, comprising \$11.3 million for Operating Expenditure, \$4.5 million for Capital expenditure and \$718,000 for Value Added Tax (VAT).

The sustainable development and management of Fiji's forest resources is at the heart of the Ministry's strategic direction, which is clearly articulated in its 13-Year Strategic Plan and annual

operation plans. These corporate documents are aligned to Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plans and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and other international conventions.

As stated by the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, the 2019-2020 Budget is dedicated to supporting five fundamental pillars of modernity, which are strengthening law and order, protecting our natural environment, empowering young Fijians, spurring technology and innovation, and building certainty in an uncertain world.

On strengthening law and order, the 2019-2020 budget allocation will support the enforcement of forestry legislations, policies and regulations to sustainably develop Fiji's forests.

The Ministry will review the Forest Act and subsequent legislations and policies, to ensure among other things, the conservation of forestry resources, transparency and fairness in issuance of forest harvesting licences, and provide efficient and effective extension support services to our stakeholders, whilst bringing the Fijian people into fuller and more active participation in socio-economic development at all levels.

Mr. Speaker, \$1.3 million has been allocated to the Ministry's policy administration, while \$452,900 has been allocated for economic policy, planning and statistics under Programme 1. An additional \$2.3 million is allocated under supportive administration in Programme 2, and \$4.45 million is allocated for monitoring, control and surveillance of harvesting and logging operations.

With all those funds, the Ministry will continue to reposition its professional and technical personnel in the forested areas around the country, especially to improve the working relationship with the forestry industry and help them understand the forest laws and regulations. The repositioning will also enable the Ministry to better monitor harvesting and sawmilling operations, to ensure compliance with licensing conditions, including the Harvesting Code and the Environment Management Act through the conduct of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

It will also ensure that correct information is obtained on the changes to our forests, including the volume of trees harvested and the output of all sawmills. A key component of this initiative is to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of revenue from our forest resources as part of Fiji's social justice measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on protecting our natural environment, the Ministry will work towards striking a balance between facilitating the gradual increase of the forestry sector's contribution to Fiji's economic growth and protecting Fiji's natural forests and the environment.

Honourable Speaker, \$2.56 million is allocated to the Forest Conservation and Management Services. This includes \$490,700 capital co-funding for the programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation or REDD+. This will maintain Government's commitment to Fiji's REDD+ Programme, which is complemented with a \$1.5 million grant from the World Bank.

The REDD+ Programme aims to address a broad range of issues from sustainable forest management, conservation and protection of the environment, facilitating socio-economic development through carbon trading and benefit-sharing, to building climate resilient communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to update Parliament that Fiji will be presenting its Emission Reduction Programme (ERP) to the World Bank in July this year. The ERP has been developed through wide consultations with forest resources owners, Civil Society Organisations, various institutions and members of the public.

It is very pleasing to note, Honourable Speaker, that women's groups have been important contributors during the consultations. My Ministry believes that we can also empower more women to help drive the forestry sector. Not only does Fiji has a woman as Conservator of Forests leading the scientific and technical personnel, but the Ministry continues to recruit qualified female as forestry professionals.

The Ministry is also increasing our support for women in the communities to establish nurseries and raise seedlings for Fiji's tree planting initiative. The empathetic and gentle nurturing characteristics of women have demonstrated in raising children could perhaps be transformed into caring for our trees and the environment. This will ensure that the future of Fiji's forestry sector is secure.

Still under the key pillar of Protecting our Natural Environment, \$1.59 million is allocated for Extension and Advisory services. This includes \$1.05 million specifically for the Reforestation of Degraded Forests (RDF). This allocation will allow the Ministry to continue and indeed increase its planting programmes targeting vulnerable and degraded areas, thereby increasing Fiji's forest cover and mitigating the impact of climate change.

The increased allocation will also help fund Fiji's Four Million Trees in Four Years (4MT4Y) initiative. As a quick update on this initiative, Fiji has planted close to 300,000 new trees since January 2019. We intend to accelerate the tree-planting in the new fiscal year, working in partnership with all Fijians.

On this occasion, Honourable Speaker, I wish to thank all those who have seen the merit of this initiative and have contributed to planting trees. They include: His Excellency the President Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote, who launched the initiative in January; the Honourable Prime Minister and Government Members of Parliament; the United Nations Secretary-General and other Dignitaries, sports personalities and various individuals and organisations both, locally and from abroad. Honourable Speaker, I wish to invite honourable Members of the Opposition to put aside their political ideologies and join in this tree-planting initiative for the sake of our beloved nation.

Honourable Speaker, the renewed effort on tree-planting will reduce erosion and siltation while offsetting some of our carbon output. Tree-planting will also extend to mangroves to help protect our coastal ecosystems. Importantly, this large-scale tree-planting initiative will ultimately enable the country to protect the native forests, including our water sources and rich biodiversity. This will minimise the changes to our natural ecosystem.

The initiative will also support Fiji's energy sector in promoting renewable energy and greater technology. It also includes the greening and beautification of our towns, cities and roads, and the establishment of more forest parks for the benefit of Fijian citizens and tourists. In the long term, Honourable Speaker, Sir, these trees will contribute to Fiji's economic growth, especially sandalwood and commercial plantation species.

Mr. Speaker, \$566,600 is allocated for forest parks, recreation and nature reserves. This includes \$200,000 specifically for the maintenance and improvement of forest parks. I am also pleased to inform this august Parliament that the Ministry is reviewing the lease for the Colo-i-Suva Forest Park to correct the injustice that previous Governments have made to the resource owners where they have been receiving a meagre \$2.60 per hectare. Like all other FijiFirst initiatives, we intend to ensure that we strike a win-win, no zero sums equation with the resource owners, all for the greater good of the nation.

The Colo-i-Suva Forest Park is becoming an iconic landmark for Fiji from an environment, biodiversity, recreation and economic perspective. It has been dedicated to the Queen's

Commonwealth Canopy which comprises a network of forests conservation initiatives that allows people to have a heightened appreciation of trees and forests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on empowering young Fijians, the Ministry's development initiatives have a specific focus on the young people of Fiji. The 4MT4Y Initiative is, in fact, an investment in our youth and children. The Initiative seeks to actively engage young Fijians at the school-age level to enable them to have a deeper appreciation of trees and forests. It will also encourage youth, and might I add women's groups, to set up nurseries to raise and sell seedlings. Importantly, when these millions of trees mature in the next three decades, it is our young Fijians who will reap the benefits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on spurring technology and innovation, the Ministry will align its work with the technological innovations that Government is investing in. Our licensing procedures, for instance, will be facilitated online with clear timelines. The aim is to significantly reduce the turnaround time for the processing and issuance of licences. We hope to approve licences in a mere few days as opposed to the months that have been the practice for decades. Applicants should also be able to track the stages of their applications.

The Ministry's responsiveness and transparency are among the key platforms for assisting the forestry sector in order to increase the sector's contribution to Fiji's overarching economic growth. The Ministry also intends to invest in technology to help monitor harvesting activities and the changes that are taking place in our forests. Technology and innovation will, undoubtedly, be a game-changer for the forestry sector, as indeed for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on building certainty in an uncertain world, the certainty that the forestry sector can provide to the people of Fiji is the assurance that Government's strategies are ultimately aimed towards achieving a holistic, inclusive and sustainable foundation for the nation, both for the current and future generations.

The Ministry's advice to the communities will be enhanced by scientific evidence. This would mean, strengthening collaboration with research and academic institutions both, locally and internationally.

The Ministry is conducting comparative analysis or global scans of countries that have set the benchmark with the management of their forest resources. We intend to learn from these countries to ensure that Fiji's forest sector is sustainable in every sense of the word. Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is based on the belief that sustainable forest management comes from sound research and development.

The Silviculture Research Division at Colo-i-Suva has been allocated a budget of \$551,000 to enhance its research capacity and competencies.

In the 2018-2019 Budget, the Division was able to appoint two very highly qualified and experienced consultants, who have very good links with forestry research institutes around the world, to re-define the Division's role and to develop Fiji's seed bank to support Fiji's tree-planting programme. The budget for the new financial year will enable the Ministry to progressively implement the outcomes of these consultancies.

Suffice to say, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is placing renewed focus on research and development as this will help inform Fiji's strategies for the forestry sector.

The Timber Utilisation and Research Division in Nasinu has been allocated \$1.7 million to conduct sound and accurate analysis of treated timber produced by sawmills, and ensure compliance and quality assurance to the timber preservative regulation and required standards of the building

construction industry. The Division will develop a national plywood standard and it will research and develop wood and non-wood species.

I am also pleased to inform this august House that the Ministry continues to provide training for saw-millers and timber processing workers as part of its support towards strengthening the timber industry, allowing them to create more employment opportunities and contribute to improved livelihoods. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$244,220 of the \$1.7 million is allocated specifically for the Timber Industry Training Centre at Nasinu.

Still on training, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has been allocated an additional \$1 million for training and education. This comprises \$245,000 for the Forestry Training Centre at Colo-i-Suva and an additional \$72,000 for Fiji's Forest Wardens, who are helping the Ministry as Government's eyes and ears, especially in the rural and remote communities.

Honourable Speaker, community-based forest plantations will continue to receive support from the Government through the Fiji Pine Trust with an operating grant of \$745,102. The Trust assists landowners to establish nurseries to raise, nurture and distribute pine seedlings; supervise plantation establishment, harvesting and processing; and restore harvested areas. This budget will continue to support the rural and maritime communities.

The Ministry will improve its monitoring of the work of the Fiji Pine Trust to ensure that the re-planting programmes are successful and they are accurately captured in the Ministry's database.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to support the establishment of Small and Medium Enterprises in the Forestry Sector. Sir, \$50,000 is allocated to continue the provision of subsidy on the purchase of forest value-adding machines to nurture new and emerging cottage industries. This is yet, again, an important component of the FijiFirst Government's efforts to ensure that the forestry sector continues to stimulate a positive and lasting impact on the people, whose livelihoods are sourced from forest resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$1.2 million is allocated for the capital purchases of forestry harvesting and processing machines. This will importantly support our maritime pine schemes in the utilisation of their resources for building improved housing, leveraging opportunities for income generation and elevating living standards.

I am, again, pleased to inform this august House that Government intends to help our communities in the maritime zone to harvest the mature pine resources, and to ensure that the dreams of their forefathers when they started planting trees over four decades ago, are transformed into reality.

Through close collaboration with the landowners and other agencies in Government and the private sector, my Ministry can help create increased wealth in the maritime zone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has clearly demonstrated its leadership, vision and total commitment when it comes to ensuring the sustainability of its forestry resources to cater for the current and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend this Budget to this august House and I look forward to a successful 2019–2020 fiscal year for the forestry sector, and the nation as a whole. *Vinaka vakalevu, shukriya and dhanyavaad.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for Forests for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Ma'am.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, like many of my Parliamentary colleagues, I came to this House with the sole purpose of making a change for the better in the lives of our fellow citizens. Like many of my Parliamentary colleagues, I firmly believe in the principles of genuine equality of opportunity, genuine reconciliation and genuine forethought for the future of our country.

These principles, however, are principles not expressed by the Honourable Attorney-General when he introduced to this august House the 2019-2020 Budget. Instead, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy thought it fit to stroke the past in a diatribe that lasted for over half an hour, as if to cover up his own blunders or the blunders of his Government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to borrow and paraphrase the slogan of the taxpayer-funded Fiji Broadcasting Commission or FBC TV, the difference is clear because clearly this Budget time around, there is no difference. The FijiFirst Government is fresh out of ideas and has *sega, nahi* sound and sensible solutions for the social, economic and political advancement of our nation. The only thing they are consistent on is, inconsistencies.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the 2019-2020 Budget handed down on Friday, 7th June, 2019 by the Honourable Minister for Economy confirms that this Government is losing ground on the necessary ideas that can bring forth real leadership and practical economic growth that Fiji solely needs to achieve that of unity, nation building and true nationhood.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address some fundamental issues related to the Budget and it is to do with the basic courtesy and just good manners. If I were to *kerekere* the Honourable Minister for Economy for \$20 in order to buy washing powder like Boom, you can expect that during my *kerekere*, I will be very polite and very humble, and that upon purchase of the washing powder I owed to him to show proof of purchase, otherwise he would label me as a liar or a con artist.

What I have seen thus far is deeply disappointing, Mr. Speaker. Many Government institutions, statutory entities and private organisations that fall under the various Ministries, are so quick to put in their Budget submissions and talk or project themselves up when it is budget time but they do not reciprocate or honour the taxpayers or even the laws that mandate their accountability and table their annual reports. This is as clear a signal as any of unprofessional incompetence, and I fully intend to ensure this is corrected, even those hiding in Head 50 getting grants, who are so quick to inhale public funds from many people earning as little as \$2.68 an hour must account for every cent in the highest court of the land, this House, the people's House.

Mr. Speaker, the National Federation Party (NFP) subscribes to principles that will correct economic imbalance so that economic growth benefits all instead of a Government's legislative control of the economy. So, what transpired in the period of the so-called unprecedented economic growth of 10 straight years leading up to this "Bainimarama Boom Budget" or "Boom, Boom, Boom Budget" as stated by the Prime Minister himself?

For all intents and purposes, this Budget is a noose around the neck of all ordinary Fijians and will ensure shackled hardship for our people under the sky-rocketing cost of living.

We were not the Party in control of the treasury making unilateral decisions on how to spend taxpayers' funds, they were.

We were not the Party that indulge in a campaign of fear-mongering, freebies and handouts, they were.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget is the product of two-man rule, a Budget that is desperately now trying to claw in every source of legal revenue for Government's frivolous expenditure while knowingly ignoring the fundamental issues facing all ordinary Fijians. The alarming hike in the cost of living has resulted in some meat outlets selling lamb flaps which were outlawed many years ago.

Mr. Speaker, there are families living in desperate conditions but we are told that all is well. Mothers forced to sleep on the floor of hospitals after they have just given birth but we are told that all is all right.

Families forced to eat fish bones for dinner, but we are all told that everything is all right.

Mr. Speaker, there is no growth if we do not all share in that growth. There can be no "onward march together" unless we all progress together.

The miserable minimum wage of \$2.68 per hour, the never-ending Civil Service reforms; the gutting of a once vibrant tourism industry by exorbitant taxes; a crumbling health and medical care system; the patchwork of huge craters on the road network that is further forcing motorists to frequent spare part shops and depleting their already meagre incomes; a sugar industry that is failing right under the noses of this Government and the list goes on and on and on.

This is a boom for whom, Mr. Speaker? Because there is but a small elite really benefitting from it. There is not a boom, it is only kaboom. It is a budget aimed at strangulating our ordinary Fijians. It is an attempt to salvage the pride of two men who, in adherence to the FijiFirst Constitution, have imposed their will upon all of our people but the time to be silent is over. Now we have come to this kaboom Budget, Mr. Speaker, and how have you done so?

In his maiden speech on 15th October, 2014, the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad said, and I quote:

"We have two obligations at the core of our role as Members of Parliament. First, we have to make our democracy work, and second, we have to make our democracy work for our people.

Madam Speaker, what do I mean by that? To make our democracy work, we need to ensure that our citizens and their organisations are able to freely comment, support and when needed, criticise policies and programmes being debated in this House. They need to know that our media will amplify their voices and ensure that these are directly heard by us. This way we will know how citizens feel about and experience government policies and programmes. Our democracy will grow from these new openness.

Second, we need to make our democracy work for our people....

Madam Speaker, where necessary, we will criticise Government's policies. When we do, it will not be for the sake of doing so, but because we, in our considered view, are able to provide credible alternatives."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the proposed Budget brings to mind a few commonly used phrases, "a champagne lifestyle on a beer budget" being one of them. The NFP warned last year that when FijiFirst

was trailing around the country handing out freebies that nothing was free and that all of us would end up paying sooner rather than later.

More than a decade of excessive spending which is resulting in this Fiscal Consolidation, which is just economic speak for the reduction of expenditure, and now it is time to pay the piper, so I ask again, the boom is for whom?

At the start of the first term of school this year, the Honourable Prime Minister said, and I quote:

“And I’ve always believed that funding our children’s education is the best single investment a Government can make. That is why I am proud that this year is a billion dollar year for our education system, as our last national budget saw education become the first sector to ever receive an over one billion dollar allocation”.

Boom! Not six months later and there is a budget cut of \$200 million to this “single best investment that a Government can make.

Here are some stark realities that teachers now face:

- The possibility of less pay or suddenly turning 55 – the Budget Estimates already suggest that trend in the personal emoluments allocations across all Heads.
- Larger classes – this is an existing problem. Honourable Speaker, may I just ask that we have less of this, and more of that.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- This is an existing problem that will only get worse. With budget cuts, come larger classes and research has shown that students learn better in smaller classes.

- Less spend on materials – more and more of this is going to be either provided by the teachers or the students themselves.
- Less school-wide material and technology purchases.
- Delays for new textbooks – the free textbooks are not free, yes, schools now print out textbooks that students use in classrooms, but very often they are either shared in the classroom and often cannot take them home to study. Students preferring their own home copies of textbooks will need to fork out internet and printing costs themselves. Now with the limitations of free bus fare up to only 4.30 p.m., home copies of textbooks may probably be necessary for all students.
- Less Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers – teaching just like any profession becomes stagnant without continual self-improvement. However, with budget cuts, these activities are typically some of the first to go.
- Less Electives.
- Possibility of a forced move or school closures like what happened with Laucala Bay Secondary School. The honourable calling of teaching has been reduced to being one of the most stressful jobs in the country. If they dispute that, Mr. Speaker, I challenge them to issue a statement and give our teachers that peace of mind that they require.

Blaming children for the cancellation of free milk scheme is juvenile but by now, symptomatic of a government that is out of options. Why are children being blamed, when adults like the Honourable Minister for Economy tabled that policy with much fanfare in the 2015 Budget that claimed to “turn promises into deeds”. Again the Estimates point out just how real this situation is where previous allocations of \$3.1 million from 2015 to 2018, have suddenly nose-dived to \$400,000 for those in maritime regions.

Preventing children from using the student e-ticketing bus cards after 4.30 p.m. is another knee-jerk reaction we expect from a government that is out of options. Surely, Vodafone, as a service provider for e-ticketing, should have been able to track the trends more holistically. Why cannot this august House be privy to those reports and statistics so that we can be assured that such a major policy shift is warranted?

E-ticketing is still limping from execution issues and we do not even know how much money is involved from past taxpayers’ injections and the benefit to government revenue. Vodafone really should be asked to table a report in this House.

Blaming past governments and using legacy problems is the old and worn-out crutch some in the Government side continue to use to cover up the FijiFirst Government’s failings, but what will their legacy be, I ask, Mr. Speaker? What is going to be their legacy? Loans? Debts? Even a 40-year repayment time at the end of 40 years? Mr. Speaker, through you, Sir, lesser of this and more of this, please.

Mr. Speaker, with a 40-year repayment’s time at the end of 40 years, the architects and signatories of the debts post-2005 will be long gone, but the debt will still be there for the children and young adults of today and their families to pay.

If there are going to be pay-cuts and job losses, my suggestion, Mr. Speaker, is that the very people who allowed this champagne lifestyle to carry on, whilst operating on beer money, should be the first ones to experience pay cuts and job losses.

Our economy is in the ICU because of the irresponsibility of this government. Why should the most vulnerable children, women and men suffer because of the bad financial management of our money? Why should everyday families suffer, while a few continue to benefit?

Mr. Speaker, through you, let me just ask this august House, who was Prime Minister when the:

- One Hundred Sands Limited casino blunder happened?
- Waila City happened?
- Drugs entering Fiji are at an all-time high?
- that endorsed a mobile App that actually defies the laws of physics?
- Malolo saga unfolded?

For all the talk about environment, they slashed the Department of Environment’s budget. How can we trust a government that says one thing and does another? The Malolo fiasco will not be allowed to be swept under the carpet and we will get to the truth.

How can we trust a government that believes that it knows everything? Pride comes before the fall, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Honourable Minister for Economy said one word during his Budget Address that made me sit up and take notice, and the word was humility. This Government must practice what it preaches –

humility. Accept that it make mistakes, that ordinary families of Fiji (not their families) are going to pay for, for years to come. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I say an emphatic “No” to the 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Qereqeretabua for her contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, and all those in the public gallery or watching from the comfort of their homes; a very good evening to you all.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications for the presentation of a well-planned and cost effective Budget.

National budgets are often considered as one of the pillars on which nations are built. The stronger the pillars are, the stronger the nation becomes. The budget is not just about money and figures. Just like the way we build a high raised building, the foundation and beams need to be strong to uphold the building structure.

It is about strategic planning while we are doing foundation in order to sustain the structure, no matter how high we build. Likewise, the nation’s Budget should always supplement the last year’s Budget and at the same time, create a pathway for next year’s Budget so that we can continue to build our nation, to take it to a higher level.

What I admired most about this year’s Budget announcement was the prudent and strategic allocation of resources.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- On the other hand, Honourable Speaker, I was appalled to hear that even in 2019, suggestions are being made based on ethnic lines. I just cannot understand, Honourable Speaker, Sir, what the problem the Honourable Leader of the Opposition Leader has with calling everyone a Fijian. Do we not bleed the same blood? Do we not share the same struggles? Do we not help each other when we see our fellow Fijians in need?

I just do not understand why he continues to do this for so many years. I sincerely hope that the National Federation Party (NFP) comes out strongly against such statements which are not only causing division, but also an unjustified attack on sugarcane farmers of all ethnicities. While two Honourable Members of the NFP have remained silent, I sincerely hope their leader will not hide underneath the table tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to remind the Opposition that this Government does more than any other Government has done for single Fijians.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- For every single Fijian, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religion, province, skin colour or any other factor.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we cannot change our nation if we fail to change ourselves and our mindset.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Fijians need to change their mind set to start to value what is around them. Likewise very rightfully said by Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, that Government builds the asset, but it belongs to Fijians.

We need to value it and we need to add value to it. Such a profound Budget yet unfortunately all that was seen by Opposition in this Budget was decrease in allocation and without even understanding the Budget or the impact of it, the commentary started.

We have been hearing this commentary for the past five years, Honourable Speaker, and yet the country moving forward. FijiFirst has been delivering the Budget, executing the Budget and delivering the service that was and is expected by ordinary Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- For FijiFirst, having a lawyer as Minister for Economy does not mean lawyers from the other side can now become economists as well.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Good try, Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- But, unfortunately, you have only expressed yourself and your lack of knowledge and ability on how to contribute towards a fruitful debate.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The Opposition just cannot seem to be able to put Fiji First. All that matters to them is their political future and not about the future of Fiji or Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, during the Business Committee Meeting, Opposition Whip requested for a Budget Workshop, and it was agreed to by Government to conduct the workshop where all experts, such as Permanent Secretary for Economy, CEO of Fiji Revenue and Customs Services and other Senior Officials were present to address the forum ...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order! Honourable Speaker, Sir, point of order. The Honourable Member has misrepresented in the House, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I did not, in the Business Committee, request that workshop, it was informed to us by the Secretary-General by email and I was following up on that email whether that workshop was to happen, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I did not make that suggestion. Ask the Honourable Member to withdraw that comment. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. A Budget Workshop where Senior Officials were present to address the Members and answer any questions related to the Budget.

To my surprise, Honourable Member, none of the Opposition Members turned up.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Oh! Very poor.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- This clearly showed that the Opposition Leader stopped them from finding out the truth about the Budget by not allowing them to attend.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Oh!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- They would have found out the truth and would have gained better understanding about the Budget during the workshop and their Leader had the fear of his Members supporting the Budget instead of opposing it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A point of order, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- A point of order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Once again, the Honourable Member is misrepresenting the House. He has now alleged that the Honourable Leader here has to have stopped us from going to the workshop.

Now, if the Honourable Attorney-General recalls from our Business Committee Meeting, that we had indicated that if he had this workshop earlier in the week, then it would have been possible for us to attend. But, he did not schedule it earlier in the week, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

And we were busy on that Friday, we had our own work to do, so that Honourable Member needs to withdraw his comment about our Leader. He is misrepresenting the House in making that allegation. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Tabuya is actually misleading Parliament itself. In her response to the Honourable Whip from Government side that there was no discussion about it being on Friday or whatever date.

The Honourable Tabuya asked whether we are going to have a similar workshop and we did say, as we have done in previous years, we will have a similar workshop. She did say, "If you can let us know when the workshop will be held", we said, "Yes we will let you know".

Mr. Speaker, you were there, the Honourable Prime Minister and everyone else was there and the Committee was there. That was the extent of the discussions. And she is misrepresenting it, saying that we actually agreed on some kind of date. She said, "If you have it earlier" or "if you have it later, we will not turn up," none of that was discussed, and the Business Committee Meeting Minutes will demonstrate that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The response by Honourable Maharaj, the Whip, about whether allegedly the Honourable Leader of the Opposition allowed his Members to come or not, this is taken in the spirit of the debate that we have been having now. They have made all sorts of allegations and statements without any factual basis. If the Honourable Whip has missed out the word "alleged", of course, then we are not in a court of law but he probably would put that in.

But the fact of the matter is, there has been a lot of gesticulating coming from the other side. There has been a lot of innuendos made, assumptions made without any factual basis from the other side.

(Honourable Opposition Members interjected)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is very simple, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You cannot handle the truth!

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think the point has been made by both sides. It was discussed in the Business Committee, and whatever was discussed in the Business Committee stays put.

Honourable Maharaj, you have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Sir, on this note, I would like to request the Opposition to stop begging for such things and wasting our time, when they do not have to attend. Perhaps, this is why the Honourable Nawaikula is not aware that there was no cut in any salary. Sorry, Honourable Naiwakula, I was not here when you delivered your speech, because I knew you would speak.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is very, very serious. He has not looked at the Budget. Everywhere there is a cut, except the Ministry of Health. So do not come here and mislead the House.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

You have the floor, Honourable Maharaj.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You do not understand. The Ministry's cut does not mean SEG 1 cut.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Sorry, Honourable Nawaikula, and I will repeat this, I was not in the House when you delivered your speech because I knew you would speak everything else, except the truth.

(Laughter)

Had I been present in the Chambers, I would have actually lifted my hands to disagree with you. I totally disagree that there was a cut in salary due to reduction in the budget. So, if you lie about this, how can we believe the rest of the things you spoke about?

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the lack of wisdom, respect and knowledge was shown when the Honourable Bulanauca was speaking earlier today. I must remind him that this is FijiFirst Government, led by the Honourable Prime Minister, and not the "Banimarama/Khaiyum Government". When he cannot respect Honourable Members of Parliament, how will he and other Honourable Members of the Opposition respect ordinary Fijians?

Honourable Speaker, Sir, he needs to put his brain in the bucket filled with that Boom detergent sitting on his table.

(Laughter)

That might just clean his mind and his thoughts. And, Honourable Member, if that does not help, let me know, I will provide some Janola for free.

(Laughter)

It might be then he may start to respect Honourable Members of Parliament, instead of calling Members by their names.

Let me remind the Honourable Member that the Honourable Attorney-General's surname is "Sayed-Khaiyum" and not "Khaiyum". How would it seem if I start calling you "Nauca", or your leader as "Buka", or the Honourable Niko Nawaikula as "Kula".

(Laughter)

Please, learn to respect others before you can expect some respect for yourself.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I know and I understand that the Honourable Attorney-General is a smart and more learned than you are, and you hate him for that. But that does not mean that you show disrespect to him in this august House.

We recognise and respect your leadership as Honourable and we expect the other side to do the same. If you continue with such a cheap shot, I do not think you qualify to be an Honourable Member yourself.

As I alluded to earlier, all Fijians need to take ownership of the properties that the Government is building around us. It is built for them and it is going to be utilised by them, so what is the harm in keeping it safe? Why do we still have the mindset that it is the Government's property so why should we care?

The nation cannot be built overnight. The vision of our Honourable Prime Minister is to reform organisations, such as the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) to sustain it and not like some other leaders sitting here, who carried out reforms to close the door of organisations, such as the National Bank of Fiji (NBF).

Honourable Speaker, one does not have to have PhD in Economics to know that economic growth and social financial management create more jobs and hence, reduce overall unemployment, as well as youth unemployment. This is particularly true, if economic growth is sustained for a longer period of time, such is the case in Fiji under our Honourable Prime Minister. Ten years of economic growth means more jobs, more opportunities for Fijians, thus leading to a better living standard.

Honourable Speaker, the 2019-2020 Budget shows that the FijiFirst Government is serious and committed to what we have said all along. The Opposition has nothing to add value to the debate. We had announced in our previous Budget that we are on the path of fiscal discipline, that the deficit will be reduced. We have also informed this House that part of the expenditure in the past two Budgets was associated with rebuilding and rehabilitation works associated with *TC Winston*.

Honourable Speaker, when we spend to build, the Opposition cries that we are spending too much. When we spend less on operation, they cry when are spending too little. Can we take them seriously?

When asked for an alternative Budget, they said they do not have it. There seems to be too much division within the Party members that they cannot come to consensus in formulating an alternative Budget. I asked them, what do they have that they can offer to our nation?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We sack the Prime Minister, we sack the Attorney-General!

(Laughter)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Basically nothing, Honourable Niko Nawaikula, nothing.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the Budget should be commended as there is no increase in VAT, there is no increase in corporate tax, there is no increase in PAYE, no salary cuts and no job losses.

Honourable Speaker, some of the Opposition members have said, “no increase in beer and cigarette taxes is a great thing. While we do acknowledge that there is no increase, should Honourable Opposition Members go out and start promoting the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes? Being in Opposition, it does not mean bringing in negativity in everything.

This brings me to my next point that youth groups in Fiji are very vulnerable to information that flows all around. In this modern world, technology plays a very important role when it comes to interacting with people. digitalFiji is the way forward, the initiative shown by the Government of having everything on digital platform has taken Fiji to the next level within the region.

Accessibility to free and fast internet in public places allows Fijians to be well connected to the rest of the world. In this ever-changing world, these are things that we need to have on our fingertips, and that is exactly where this Government is taking this nation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, youth unemployment has always been an issue but this Government just does not live with such issues, we believe in resolving it. Bringing the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Ministry of Youth and Sports under one leadership was once again a bold step by the Government to see how best we can help our youth through the National Employment Centre (NEC) for them to secure a job and improve the standard of their livelihood.

The two Ministries would be working closely to train youth registered in NEC to provide them with relevant training and upgrading their skills for them to participate in Seasonal Working Scheme and Pacific Labour Scheme. The youth registered in NEC would be trained by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Once well trained, they would be awarded certificates which will also assist them in applying for Seasonal Working Scheme and Pacific Labour Scheme.

There are lot of things these two Ministries can do together, along with other Ministries to ensure FijiFirst Government’s vision of “No one is left behind.” Very soon the Ministry will go online as far as NEC is concerned, to ensure that potential employers can simply go online to access information with regards to the Fijians registered with NEC from the comfort of their office, rather than them having to visit the Ministry.

The full profile of a person registered with NEC will be available online. With the vision of digitalFiji, we must act smart and align ourselves and our Ministry to be up to par with technology. The two Ministries will work closely with other Ministries and take advantage of the opportunities created through the economy. The future of the nation depends on the investment that is done in our youths. Youths are our nation’s foundation and we need to ensure that we invest in them to have a stronger foundation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I salute this Government for giving so much importance to the younger generation. With those words, I fully support this year’s National Budget. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen, all those listening through the radio or viewing the Parliament session tonight; I rise, Sir to offer my remarks on the 2019-2020 Budget that was presented by the Minister for Economy, Honourable Aiyaz Khaiyum.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sayed-Khaiyum is my surname. Please, get it right.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Sir, I fully endorse the 2019-2020 Budget response delivered eloquently by the Leader of the Opposition, former Prime Minister, the Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka, the Opposition's spokesperson for Finance and Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this side of the House has consistently raised concerns over the years that our economy is not performing and all the macro indicators of the downward trend, including the performance of our resource-based sectors. Despite all the information available, the Government continued to give handouts knowing that it is not sustainable in the long run. In this environment, our people will remain dependent rather than empowered to innovate and utilise resources available to them to walk out of poverty.

Sir, while an Honourable Member from the other side claimed the increase of tax threshold to \$30,000 is a big relief to the poor, in fact, many were earning below the previous threshold of \$16,000, in any case. For those trying to innovate and walk out of poverty, excessive fees are killing them. They are sent from pillar to post that costs them productive hours and transport fees just to get licences and approvals.

Now, with the many functions of Rural Local Authorities transferred to Town Councils, our people in rural areas are further penalised with higher fees, whereas before they only paid nominal fees to health inspectors.

Role of Opposition: Sir, as a Member of the loyal Opposition of the Republic of Fiji, our role is not only one of criticism but, at times, to offer agreement, assistance or improvements to the actions and policies of Government.

Mr. Speaker, I am hearing claims of sabotage and disloyalty from the other side of the House. I wish to reiterate, Sir, that descent is the highest form of patriotism and blind faith in bad leadership is not patriotism. I would argue therefore, Sir, that it would be unpatriotic and disloyal to our people to remain silent in the face of financial and economic mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, while this side of the House is simply urging caution, we hear extreme exaggeration from the other side. We are not the ones talking about collapse, all we are saying and urging is caution, and you may check the *Hansard*. It is unfortunate that FijiFirst Members have reverted to their fear-mongering tactics from the 2018 Elections by trying to demonise this side of the House.

I wish to raise as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this side of the House has been proposing an alternative budget in all our contributions to the Budget Debate since 2014, in particular, in the Committee of Supply; were the other side not paying attention? A major difficulty with the Opposition, Sir, is that Government disallows civil servants from responding to request for information from the Office of the Leader of the Opposition unlike previous more democratic Governments.

Sir, the FijiFirst Party have the services of 30,000 plus civil servants and all the data of Government but we still have a disconnect between estimates and reality in the National Budget for the last 13 years. Perhaps, this is why Government refuses to release information to the Opposition, this is something perhaps to hide.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA has a very clear manifesto on the formation of an alternative budget would be no difficulty if the Government were not so fearful to release information publicly as previous governments did. In any case of Committee of Supply is where we propose particular amendments to the proposed Budget, our alternative Budget.

I wish to talk on the Bainimarama Boom, Mr. Speaker, Sir, much has been said about the Bainimarama Boom. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition have Boom soap packets here because we need to clean up the doom and gloom for the last 13 years. A self-proclaimed boom has benefitted only a selected few who have lined their pockets while almost 50 percent of our people face hardship and more people are living in squatter settlements. *TC Winston* Rehabilitation is not complete, it is now over 3.5 years later, evacuation centres destroyed by *TC Winston* has not been rebuilt, in particular, the churches and community halls.

The Government should help communities to repair their churches and halls because if there were another cyclone, it is the only place that they will run to. I speak, in particular for the District of Dawasamu in Tailevu, they had the churches during *TC Winston* as their evacuation centres and in the process these churches were partly destroyed. The people have been continuing to try to rebuild these churches, they would do with a bit of help from Government. I speak in regards to Nataleira Village, Driti, Drano and Silana.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013-2014 Household Income and Expenditure Survey revealed that 28 percent of our people are living below the poverty line and another 20 percent are on the margin and facing daily hardship. Yet, there are no measures in the 2019-2020 Budget to reduce the high cost of living. In fact, as stated earlier, when trying to setup small canteens or to enter business, the poor are penalised by more regulations and fees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government policies have hurt the poor, Government is wasting taxpayers hard earned money, Government is not credible and Government is irresponsible. Government's previous budgets were promised on false revenue which were not raised and inflated expenditure which were not utilised.

Mr. Speaker, one big waste I have to raise is excessive motorcades that Government's puts on for visiting dignitaries. They think that it signals a prosperity of the nation, they are sadly mistaken because its grand ceremonies and motorcades are symptomatic of dictatorship rule that we have had in this country. The Police should be focusing on investigating and solving crimes rather than these ceremonial duties. When citizens ask for help, there are no Police vehicles but we see them driving around escorting some Ministers and dignitaries.

The Military should also be focussed on their basic role to defend the nation and assist in national development rather than accompanying Ministers to make them feel good of their excessive six-car motorcades. How many millions are being spent on this that could be better spent on our people's wellbeing?

Furthermore, Sir, can the Government consider reducing excessive salaries and allowances for the Prime Minister, Cabinet and Permanent Secretaries and reduce excessive salaries whether for the expatriates? They constantly recruit overlooking our own home grown experts. It is the height of disloyalty to our people to employ expatriates while we lose our people to other nations.

Mr. Speaker, as a Shadow Minister for Justice, Communications and Assistant Shadow Minister for iTaukei Affairs, my contribution will also be on these portfolios.

The Ministry of Justice, Mr. Speaker, an allocation of \$6.1 million is estimated for the Ministry of Justice in this Budget. It says a reduction of \$1.9 million from the previous year. The reduction includes \$300,000 from personal emoluments; \$765,000 for the digitisation programme; and \$100,000 for the establishment of the consumer tribunal which is yet to be operational.

Sir, I must express concern at the reduction of staff costs. Mr. Speaker, across all Government agencies there have been massive cuts to staff establishment. We have to ask the Government's intention for those who are losing their jobs. Are they being redeployed? Will they be assisted to be self-employed or to establish small or micro enterprises? What of their family's welfare? Sir, these are not just numbers that the Honourable of Minister is slashing, this is the well-being and welfare of many of our people and their families.

Sir, regarding the digitisation programme, I will be interested to hear the progress in the expenditure in the last year with the allocation of \$1 million, the previous year's allocation of \$1.7 million. What is the progress of the digitisation programme? Has there been a Performance Audit?

The Ministry of Communication, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an allocation of \$74.6 million is proposed, an increase of \$11.8 million from the 2018-2019 Budget allocation. Again there is a reduction of about \$825,000 in staff establishment that I am very concerned about, in particular, the welfare of families of staff whose contracts may not be renewed for those posts that are being phased out. A huge sum of \$39.1 million allocated for the Digital Transformation initiative, this does not include \$1 million in the Ministry of Justice for digitisation and in other Ministries, Sir.

I have to ask, how much of this going to the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise? Why we are so desperate to impress the Singaporeans? Is it because someone has purchased property there? Is there intended bolt-hole to escape as we now have direct flights to Singapore?

While technology and the connectivity is all good, we do have to feed our nation. As stated earlier by our Honourable Opposition Leader, food security is a national priority. The low allocation of \$800,000 to non-sugar agriculture, one of our key productive resource-based sectors, does not make sense. So, we must have a balance between wanting to copy Singapore in terms of technology and the need to ensure food security in ensuring that 44 percent of our population, which is about 390,000 people, who continue to live in the rural areas are assisted to enter commercial farming from subsistence farming.

Mr. Speaker, the difference in Singapore is a modern city. Its population is almost all urban based and they import 90 percent of their food from more than 160 countries. Is that the FijiFirst vision for Fiji? I raise the following concerns; did the first e-Government project failed because the Minister sacked their ITC Directors until Yalamanchili Limited was engaged through Pacific Technologies, whose Director became Director of ITC for some years?

There is also a question on the transfer of Government ITC Services to the Minister for Communications, all done silently by the Honourable Minister. He rearranges the whole of Government to suit his whims, holding more and more agencies and Ministries under his portfolio.

It is worrying, Sir, that three of the central agencies that were previously a check and balance on each other, Public Service Commission now the Ministry of Civil Service; the Attorney-General's Office and the Ministry of Finance now the Ministry of Economy are all under the control of one Minister not to mention all the many agencies under his belt, including all the public enterprise entities.

Sir, he must be a superman! Does he ever get any sleep? How is he managing all these portfolios? At the very least, this may explain the disconnect in budget figures between estimates,

allocations and reality over the last few years. Other than that, I would advise the Prime Minister to seriously consider the workload that his No. 2 is carrying, and the implications for our government, our nation and our people.

Back to Digital Fiji Initiative, I repeat my caution to the Honourable Attorney-General expressed in Parliament on 2nd April, that in its rush to modernise Fiji, the Government should consider our people, their accessibility to the internet, and to smart devices, as well as their privacy and civil liberties. National security and sovereignty must also be considered, as well as the need to support our local companies and ICT experts.

As the late *Turaga Bale*, Ratu Sukuna had said, “*Vakusakusa vakamalua*” or “hasten slowly”.

Budgetary Provision for the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs: Mr. Speaker, the total provision for the Ministry for iTaukei Affairs is \$15.4 million. Of this, Operating Expenditure, \$14.7 million to cover the Operating Cost and \$500,000, for Capital Expenditure. This is merely 0.06 percent of the total expenditure budgeted for 2019-2020.

The first people of the nation have facilitated the development of this nation through the agreement of their forefathers for the Native Land Trust Board to administer their land. I would like to sincerely suggest that government consider the following measures:

- Provision of diggers to all 189 Tikina Councils to facilitate the development of their land.
- The proposed Yaqona Corporation should be owned by the 14 Provincial Councils and policies developed to ensure the proper utilisation of land, sourcing of markets, consistency of supplies, et cetera.
- There are over 5,000 of the First People to this Nation without land, they are landless. I would ask Government to review the listing of landless people and ensure that they are provided land from within their *Yavusa* or under new policy or legal provision.
- The Government to consider the preservation of the Deed of Cession documents 1874, and the Independence documents, as well as the First Immigration Pass on 14th May, 1897 of the first *Girmitiyas*, who had travelled on the *Leonidas*, the first boat that had brought the first lot of *Girmitiyas* to our shores.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It was 1879 not 1897!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I made a mistake in reading, 1879, you are correct, Honourable Minister for Economy and Attorney-General.

Good governance and well-being of iTaukei: Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is disheartening to note the infringements on the rights of the indigenous Fijians, despite Government’s obligation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous People’s Rights which clearly outline the requirements of ‘free and prior informed-consent’ of the Fijian people, for any decision that impact on their institutions, their way of life and their resources. These rights are the minimum standards for indigenous people worldwide, globally recognised by the UN and ILO.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognition of the rights of the indigenous people of Fiji is in harmony with SODELPA's policy to welcome and acknowledge the other ethnic communities who have made Fiji their home.

I will now turn to the Village By-Law, Sir; an allocation of \$45,000 has been provided. I note, Sir, that Government had announced to shelve the solving of the By-Laws of the Consultations in 2018. Now they have another \$45,000 in the Budget. The people have had their say, Sir, why resurrect it, or is it another example of over-budgeting?

A point that I wish to bring up is the difference in the payment of allowances that is being paid for the *Nasi ni Koro* or the Community Health Workers and the *Turaga ni Koro*. The *Nasi ni Koro* is being paid \$200 a month whilst the *Turaga ni Koro* is only being paid \$80 a month, equivalent to that \$2.80 a day.

I know the *Turaga ni Koro* work all hours and have no time for their own 'teitei' or their family's well-being. I appeal to government to equalise the allowances.

In conclusion, Sir, I reiterate the offer of the Leader of the Opposition to the Prime Minister to work together for the common good of this country. It is unfortunate that the Government continues to refuse motions and proposals for bipartisan, working together for the common good. It is time the Government should make an effort to work with the Opposition and other key stakeholders to save our beloved nation.

The honourable Opposition Leader on this side of the House remains committed to consensus-building, inclusive and equitable leadership to attain the dream of a progressive and united Fiji where the rights of all individuals and communities are respected, including the native indigenous community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Budget and I regret that I cannot support it for the reasons that I have stated. *Vinaka saka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, the Honourable Joseph Nand. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, honourable Minister for Economy, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public present here in the gallery and those at home watching or listening live to the radio, and members of the media fraternity: Honourable Speaker, Sir, I stand with great pride as a Member of the FijiFirst Government to dwell on the 2019-2020 Budget which is undoubtedly very good for all Fijians.

The Budget is surely going to move our nation forward in terms of providing quality education and if I may say so, from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts perspective. Some have commented that the overall amount has decreased but one needs to open his or her eyes to see that it is sufficient enough to administer the Ministry's overall expenditure.

There has been a sufficient cut because we have completed the rehabilitation post-*TC Winston* on May 12. This Budget has been expertly developed under the able leadership of our Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to elaborate just a few things on the allocation for the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts in the 2019-2020 Budget. This allocated amount is prudent

enough to facilitate the operation of the Ministry and move forward in terms of development and reforms to better the service delivery.

In doing so, we shall stay committed to the SDG Goal 4 of Quality Education. With the current amount, we remain committed towards our SDG targets for the next fiscal year. The allocation amount has been done by not keeping in mind the interest of everyone else but the students themselves, who are our core customers.

I strongly feel that everything decided must be in the best interest of our students and that is what we can clearly see as it is reflected in this proposed Budget. We have played our part in rebuilding much stronger and safer school buildings after *TC Winston*, and now we need to focus on other things which definitely may not be that costly but require a higher level of commitment in terms of better strategies and efforts.

Where we need to maintain our commitment in terms of infrastructure development, we have not turned a blind eye towards it, but stood tall and to state an example, the Phase III Construction of Bau Central College.

In a nutshell, Honourable Speaker, Sir, not only one Ministry, the FijiFirst Government has remained on its stance in enhancing institutions which are going to be very beneficial to every Fijian. As always, a lot of emphasis is given by the Government in ensuring that the livelihood of an individual continues to improve. Social pension, free busfare for citizens and those benefits never ever existed in Fiji until the FijiFirst Government progressively took all these on board.

I, for one, personally feel that there needs to be focus on what Fijians on the ground can get instead of the number of dollars to each Ministry. If you have great minds with great ideas which we have on this side of the House, Fijians will continue to benefit, to progress and get more opportunities unlike before when they had little hope. For example, if you give someone \$1,000, he or she spends lavishly, where someone who has \$500 makes good use of the amount. Who has benefitted?

Therefore, not important is the amount itself, but the ideas, strategies and implementation that matters and I am pleading for us to see from that perspective. If one starts listing down the new initiatives brought in by the FijiFirst Government, the list will be unmatched by anyone in our history. We had been doing this with due diligence to the people of Fiji and we shall continue doing this.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, through this and the previous budget by our Government, common people have been able to dream of decent houses, drive respectable vehicles and have a brighter future for their children. All these things were blurry some two decades ago. Our commitment has not been limited to the materialistic and the luxurious aspect of things but also towards our environment and health to ensure that we not only get peace and harmony from these materialistic items but enjoy good health and build good environment for us in the future.

We have never had such strong presence in climate change campaign until our Honourable Prime Minister rocked the world with COP 23 Presidency. Honourable Speaker, Sir, please, let me put this on record that the Budget presented on 7th of June, 2019, is not being developed by plucking things out of thin air, but it has been developed after thorough research and wide accessible consultation.

The online consultation has made consultations so easy that people even contributed towards 2019–2020 Budget from the comforts of their homes. This is why we can deservingly say that this is people's Budget. Through this consultative Budget, the Government is facilitating what Fijians want to see in their daily lives.

It is explicitly evident that our Budget is not only meeting the current needs but enabling us to sustain things for the future. We need to look at the bigger picture instead of our nose-length vision. As I know, Mr. Speaker, many in this Parliament do not have long noses.

Practically, not everything can happen overnight and if it did, it would be in wonderland. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other side would have done it during terms in the past when Fiji went backwards. Certain things have been cemented from the past which need real water blasting on a progressive basis and that is something which we need to digest, understand and live with it.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has presented the Budget which is realistic, achievable and manageable and is very much in line with our commitment towards Sustainable Development Goals and National Development Plan.

With all these, we are rapidly progressing towards creating a high tech society so that we are compatible with other countries outside the Pacific and definitely lead the way in comparison to all other Pacific countries. Through proper Budget allocation, it is very-much ensured that we are inclusive in terms of the people with special needs and gender-wise as well.

As for special needs, allocation of \$500 per child grant to schools which is one of the many initiatives to ensure that Government provides the necessary financial support to schools to take care of the students with special needs.

As you know, this will continue under the proposed Budget as well. Allocating \$850,300 to Frank Hilton Organisation is a form of a grant. This is another clear example of our inclusivity at the community level.

Once again to be specific, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we have a close look at the detail allocation under the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, we shall find that it is a holistic approach which ranges from classroom education, vocational training, tertiary level commitment and definitely not forgetting our stance towards Heritage and Arts, so that we can continue to protect and pass on knowledge in this line.

Likewise, we can see the same in other Ministries as well. It is not the dollar itself which makes us strong in terms of developing a good nation, but rather requires wise thinking, creativity and our passion for serving the people of Fiji with a good heart.

If this is not the case, many dollars can go down the drain. Therefore, while deliberating on the Budget, we should not only look at the amount, but rather look at the number of good initiatives brought in and its positive impact on the individual Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.N. NAND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, in summary I can say that the 2019–2020 Budget is well thought and architected Budget which shall bring further smiles to our Fijian people.

Through this Budget, we are justifying and fulfilling the promises made by the FijiFirst in terms of keeping people first while running the nation. Therefore, before I take my seat, I wish to register my full support towards 2019–2020 Budget as presented by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum, on 7th June, 2019, and make it very clear that we could not have any other better Budget. I say this as this is the best for the people of Fiji, which is going to improve their livelihood on a sustainable basis in which we will do a lot more with less.

My hearty thanks and congratulation to the honourable Minister for Economy, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, for a prolific, smart and intelligent Budget. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts for his contribution. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate of the 2019 – 2020 Budget. At the outset of my speech, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for his Budget Address, though I do not agree with the content of the same.

Allow me to also express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his Budget response. I fully agree and wholeheartedly endorse the content and Budget response. I fully agree and wholeheartedly endorse the contents of the Budget response.

Sir, I wish to begin my response to the Budget with a short story told to Class 5 students when I was at school. It goes to something like this:

Once upon a time, Confucius was passing a forest in China and heard someone crying. He moved towards the place from where the sound of cry was coming and saw a woman sitting and crying between two tombs. When Confucius asked, “what was the matter”, the woman said, “There is a fierce tiger in this forest who had killed my husband first and now my son”. Confucius probed further, “Then why do you live in the forest?” The women replied, “Because there was no cruel Government over here.”

Thus, of the many famous teachings of Confucius, one that was based upon this short story was, “A fierce tiger is better than a cruel Government.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is how the people, after the Budget presentation sum up, their feelings about this Budget and about this Government forms the basis of my opposition to this Budget and Government in this debate.

Before I get into the debate proper, allow me Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the people of Namosi, to express our sincere gratitude to all the *Girmityas*, who came to work in Fiji from 1879 to 1916, as we mark 140 years of their arrival in Fiji.

Many of the sons and daughters of the *Girmityas* in Navua have made our province and district proud with their sterling achievements across the many spheres of life, like the rest of Fiji, and they also deserve our appreciation and thanks. Whether they are in Fiji or overseas, the Navua spirit continues to inspire them to reach greater heights in life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Shadow Minister for Youth and Sports, it is my pleasure to congratulate our world renowned Fiji Sevens Team, for making us proud by setting up another unparalleled record by winning the Series this year. I am hopeful that the Government will honour them more than the occasional handouts given to them after each Sevens victory.

Sir, on behalf of the Opposition, let me also felicitate Eileen Cikamatana on her success in Australia, although in this case, it was Australia’s gain and Fiji’s loss, drawing home the point on how politics divides and destroys, while sports unites and builds. I am only hopeful, given the recent treatment meted out to the Tavua College Golden boy, Yeshnil Karan, will not be another loss to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House had the opportunity to discuss a number of youth and sports issues in the last two sessions by way of debate on the Annual Report of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and ministerial statements. This Budget, present yet another opportunity for us to discuss the importance of youth and sports to our national development.

Sir, allow me to begin with youth issues. First and foremost, Fiji is now a nation of youth, given the Government definition for youth age and the component of that age group in our last National Census. It is, therefore, little surprise that a number of policies and programmes are youth-oriented to attract their attention and support.

However, the fact on youth policies and programmes of the last one decade can be summed up by the immortal words of the popular British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who once said and I quote: "You can deceive the youth because they believe in hope." This is exactly what this Government has done to our youth in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me cite a few examples of this claim:

1. The promise of one electronic gadget to every child which remains unfulfilled.
2. Provision of fee free education and calling it free education.
3. Trapping our youth in debt cycle by TELs and heavy borrowings.
4. Failing to generate investment levels up to par, to create enough jobs in the economy for our youth.
5. Spoiling student discipline in schools by removal of full time counsellors.
6. Failing to control our youth being exposed to substance abuse, crimes against immorality, HIV and NCD cases which are all on the rise involving young people.
7. Limiting the development and advancement of our young people by limited credit facilities and lack of innovative policies and programmes, and many others.

In total, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government suffers from serious policy paralysis on youth development, which is now worsened by the provision made in this Budget which continues to trend of the last one decade, albeit this time with a reduced budgetary allocation.

I will not mince my words but clearly spell out on this floor of this august House here and now, that given the last Election results and reactions of our youth to this Budget, it is now crystal clear that the faith of our youth is on the wane in this Government. They have vested their trust more in the Opposition and that is the basis of change in the making. If you do not wake up to remedy the youth issues, do not blame anyone, except yourselves when we would be changing the seats in 2022 or may be earlier.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while welcoming the Government decision to finally merge the Technical Colleges of Fiji with the Fiji National University, we are worried about a few issues that need some clarification.

1. What was the rationale and wisdom to run these technical institutions parallel to the FNU in the first place?
2. What will happen to the students who have graduated from these colleges, whether their qualification will be in par in terms of the value to those graduating from FNU?
3. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there was any assessment done in the first place or now by the Fiji Higher Education Commission in respect of aligning and merging the Technical Colleges with FNU, and what were the outcomes of the same?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House must note that our youth have been robbed more than once in the sphere of tertiary education. We have heard cases of institutions hiving overnight and students enrolling to get a qualification to find jobs. What we established later on this was that, those institutions do not have accreditation and our youth lose out their time and money and end up with a bogus qualification. This is a challenging area for the Fiji Higher Education to clamp down upon.

Sir, the next youth issue on which I intend to speak on is the benchmarking of youth training programmes. The Ministry of Youth and Sports published in its report more than three years ago, that it was planning to align its one-year youth training programme into a four-year youth training programme at the Tutu Youth Training Centre in Taveuni. I wonder whether that has happened and if not, why not?

The same report and successive reports of the Ministry of Youth clearly depicts that one staple feature of youth development is the paucity or rather lack of Government funding for youth projects.

Let me turn to sports now, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Arts and Sports are one of the highest paid vocations for our people now. Although there is a limited number of people involved in this area, their contribution to our foreign exchange earnings and in sustaining their kith and kin in Fiji, as well as the development of their respective communities is much valued.

While the Opposition does not oppose the exorbitant sums of allocations being made for international golf and rugby tournaments in this Budget and in the past Budgets, it would have been ideal instead to cut on a part of that spending and use the same to develop our local sporting facilities for competitive sports and to encourage sporting activities to arrest NCDs.

Sir, the other area that continues to be neglected in sports is the administration and development of sports medicine. This is a critical area in sports, as we have more athletes participating in competitive sports and many of these athletes later on develop lifelong ailments because the administration of sports medicine was not done in the right manner or at the right time.

Sports insurance or health insurance may be one of the ways to address this issue, but what is important is the training of development of paramedics and availability of medicines supplies at the competition venues. This is even more important, given the distance, time of travel and the quality of emergency services in our hospitals or in many Pacific countries where our national team mostly play.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, abuse of sports is another pressing issue. This is resultant either from irregularities in matches which are dealt within the organisational rules or by ill-treatment of athletes by team managers or coaches.

A number of issues to this effect were raised in the media and the nation was advised that there would be investigations by the respective sporting bodies, but so far it appears to be a forgotten issue. These issues brings me to urge the Government to establish a taskforce within FASANOC to look into means and ways to develop sports medicine and issues relating to abuse of sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just returned from Beijing after attending the Inter-Regional Seminar on SDGs, I was delighted to hear the IPU Secretary-General, Mr. Martin Chugong, in his opening speech, expressing Fiji's progress in taking the lead in engaging the SDGs. He highlighted in the forum how Fiji has undertaken initiatives in promoting and ensuring progress of the implementation of the SDGs. I am sure my colleague, the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, and our two Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu and Honourable Rosy Akbar, who were part of the parliamentary delegation are also proud of this achievement.

To build on this progress, Government and Opposition need to work together. Parliaments are at the heart of the SDGs and as SDG 16 suggests, strong, transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions are key to the achievement of all the Goals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Government for its commitment in achieving those goals and then we can all do so by working together and recognising our people's needs and challenges.

The 169 targets underpinning the SDGs are 169 ways of explaining how no one is left behind. In other words, those 17 Goals and 169 Targets for which indicators exist and monitoring systems are being set, form the basis of social contract between Parliamentarian and the people.

The 2030 Agenda is our collective key to unlocking that hope and opportunities. By working together, we can say to our people that the 2030 UN Agenda is a solemn promise to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as elected leaders, we are committed to ensure that our people can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality, and peace and security. Let us agree to work together to protect the richness of life and nature of our beloved nation, so no one is left behind.

Sir, I bring to this House the greetings of the people of Namosi, who have vested their trust in me through the popular elections for the fourth time and it is my sacred duty, both, as the traditional and political leader to express their views in this House. I hope it finds reason and ultimate resolutions to the problems faced by the people of Namosi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, it is now a widely recognised fact that Fiji is now a climate change prone country, where the most vulnerable communities are those living in rural and remote communities along the coastal belt. My village is one of them in Veivatuloa, Namosi, and I experience the problems resultant from damaged shoreline and to our ecosystem, on a daily basis.

In order to mitigate such risks sustained by such communities, I am glad that there is an allocation of \$5 million in this Budget for the development of seawalls. I am hopeful that one of those seawalls that will come up from this allocation after a long wait in the pipeline is the Veivatuloa Seawall in Namosi.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, water is a basic necessity of human life. It is rather a pity that almost half a century after our independence there are still communities along the main national highway without piped water and one such area is Wainadoi in Namosi.

The Honourable Members who were part of the last Parliament would do well to remember and remind themselves that I raised an Oral Question on this matter and the then Honourable Minister for Infrastructure in his response outlined that the water source at Nakasiniura has a capacity to supply 10 million litres of water on a daily basis where Wainadoi only needs 1.5 million litres of water daily. That leaves a surplus of 8.5 million litres of water on a daily basis.

That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister also highlighted that the survey had been done, what was pending is the negotiation with the landowners and I am appalled that the Ministry of Infrastructure has adopted such a lame duck attitude on this matter that so far as I report to this House there has been no consultation with the landowners. Despite that Mr. Speaker, Sir I wish to advise this House that we, the landowners agree to give our blessings and support to this project as it augurs well with the development and advancement of the Wainadoi community.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the large volume of surplus water that will be received at Wainadoi from this initiative, the Government can later on transform the said project into a regional

water scheme and supply piped water from Wainadoi to Nabukavesi and Mau and possibly link it to the intended regional water scheme for Veisari to Lami to resolve the long standing water problem in that area.

The next issue that is interest to the people of Namosi is the development of Navua Town which is torn between two sets of ideologies. The first school of thought is espoused by the Government to develop Navua into a town straight away while the second school of thought is by the Opposition to have the Wainadoi to Galoa zone declared a tax free zone and then gradually prepare the people of Navua to develop a town which they could sustain durably. As it appears now, the Government of the day under the false impression of its supporters is hell-bent on pursuing its own school of thought with total disregard of the views of more than half the people of Navua and the provinces of Serua and Namosi.

Sir, we have got some good reasons to argue for a tax free zone for Navua. Allow me to outline that before this House. Firstly, there is abundance of freehold land and skilled labour. Many people who work from Galoa to Wainadoi in Lami to Nausori zone end up spending 20 percent to 60 percent of their earnings in travel and communications. If a tax free zone is established in the area, it is highly likely that these people will work in Navua and save more, thus increasing their purchasing power and improve their quality of life and standard of living.

Market security and investment in infrastructure as well as the creation of new industries by way of a tax free zone will not only help improve the lives of the people of Serua and Namosi but eventually lay down the basis of sustenance and durability of Navua as a town. Right now all the towns and cities have some industrial basis upon which they survive while Navua has none.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I join my colleague, Honourable Mikaele Leawere to call upon the Government to convene a Tikina Council Meeting and facilitate the funding of many long standing community projects already approved by the Provincial Councils of the two provinces and the Navua District Advisory Council. The withholding of funding and delay in the implementation of many of these projects, some of which were promised by this Government to our people is hurting and is now taken as an act of betrayal.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been having discussions lately to establish a gas crematorium in Navua. The project is in its planning stage and given the ban on the harvest of *dogo* which was used for cremation, the project is likely to be facilitated with urgency needing government assistance. I want to sound this out here and now so that when we knock the doors of the Government, they do not find an excuse to evade their responsibility to the welfare of the people of Navua.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget will:

- Not create but rob our people of their jobs;
- Increase but decrease the cost of living;
- Is a daylight robbery making the rich richer and poor more poorer;
- Is once again a consumption driven budget;
- Discourage investors and keep our economy stagnant;
- Just to keep the Government afloat like a Babelo fish minus impetus for any major capital development;

In sum total, it is a script for an unprecedented socio-economic disaster in the making which is likely to render Fiji and its people bankrupt. The Opposition denounces this Budget and would not be...

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have exceeded your time.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- ... a party to this pathway to our financial denouncement. With these few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly oppose the 2019-2020 Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of the House and the viewers watching the Parliamentary proceedings from the comfort of their homes.

A very good evening, *ni sa bula, namaste* and *as-salamu alaikum*.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his vibrant team for the formulation of a very well thought-out and very well-considered 2019-2020 National Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is pleasing to note the very positive responses from a number of institutions, organisations and individuals. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am very impressed with the way the Fiji Institute of Accountants have analysed this Budget and I quote:

“This is a future looking Budget that builds on the unprecedented economic growth of the Fijian economy and ensures resilient progress in a changing climate and changing environment for both local and global markets.

The Budget is based on the five pillars as the key areas of focus:

1. Strengthening law and order;
2. Protecting the natural environment;
3. Empowering the young;
4. Spurring technology and innovation; and
5. Building certainty in an uncertain world.

These five pillars will be the driving factors through which the Fijians will be benefitting now in the short term and also in the long term. The Budget considers the bigger picture for every Fijian when we look into the details of these five pillars. We are going to move towards a more digitalised economy, a more greener, sustainable and progressive economic development.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this very aptly summarises the 2019-2020 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just hope that the Opposition can see the bigger picture and understand the short term and the long term benefits for our Fijian people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, do we not want to see economic development and prosperity for all Fijians?

Do we not want to have a Government that is pro-poor? Do we not want to have a Government that looks after the welfare and wellbeing of all Fijians? Do we not want to see a better and brighter future for our children and generations to come? Do we not want stability?

The answer is absolutely yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The FijiFirst Government has the vision to improve the social and economic status of our country and our people. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, the Opposition does not seem to share this vision, or I must say they do not at all have a vision of building certainty in an uncertain world. Such vision, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and stance can only be taken by a visionary leader, our Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Budget that is before us will ensure the continuity and strengthening of this vision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition Leader in his address said that this Budget reflects the leadership. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it reflects the leadership. We have a leader who:

- defines humility;
- believes in equality and inclusivity;
- is assertive and bold;
- walks the talk;
- inspires;
- is willing to take risks;
- puts family first;
- puts Fiji first;
- we can trust; and
- believes in a stable Fiji, a stronger Fiji, a progressive and empowered Fiji, a modern Fiji, a digital Fiji and a greener Fiji; and a man of vision, a man of actions and a man of results.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, this Budget does reflect the great leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji does not and cannot influence or contribute to the current global economic slowdown. In fact Fiji and other small and developing economies will be on the receiving end, therefore our budget and economic policies need to be forward thinking, that is able to absorb such shocks that happen at global level. But again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition will never understand this.

In fact, one of my friends on the other side of the House told me that being in Opposition, their job is to oppose. Oppose for the sake of opposing, Mr. Speaker? I feel sorry for them, but at what expense, Mr. Speaker? At the expense of forgetting the right and the wrong? At the expense of causing damage to the Fijian economy?

Alluding to what the Honourable Prime Minister earlier said that hammering lies after lies after lies, that people actually start believing in those lies and that is what is damaging. It is really damaging, but who will be at the receiving end? Our people? People who have voted for us and them as well. Again, Mr. Speaker, they will never understand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking at the 2019-2020 Budget allocated to the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, our Ministry has gained several increases in the allocated budget in the past two years and we are very happy that we have been provided with adequate allocations for the 2019-2020 fiscal year as well. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will have an opportunity later today to hear from

the Minister herself, as we have plans and related strategies in place to better our existing programmes and implement new ones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my capacity as Assistant Minister, I have been entrusted with the responsibility of progressing programmes related to persons living with disabilities in Fiji, and the 2019-2020 Budget will continue to cater for the needs of this vulnerable population of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish for all honourable Members of this august House to note that our Fijians with special abilities are equally entitled to constitutional equality and human rights, and we are here as leaders of this country to ensure that they are not left behind while we take Fiji forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact it is the FijiFirst Government that really changed the game in terms of the welfare and equal treatment of Fijians living with disabilities. According to the 2018 Census Report, 13.7 percent of our population aged three and above have at least one functioning challenge.

Perceptively, this Government has at its forefront, prioritised the wellbeing and protection of our differently-abled Fijians. In lieu to this, I, on behalf of the Ministry, most proudly acknowledge and welcome the following announcements made by the Honourable Minister for Economy which will not only empower the development of disability services but also promote inclusivity and a platform of equal opportunity for disabled persons:

- The Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (FNCDP) advocates the interest of persons living with disabilities through funding of the FNCDP, the national coordinating body of 71 disability development initiatives in Fiji, has been allocated \$500,000.
- Grants to Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) supports various activities undertaken by disability organisations that complement the work of Government and the FNCDP. Organisations can submit proposals to the Ministry to access grant funding. A total of \$400,000 has been allocated for the DPOs.
- Capital grants to voluntary organisations contribute to social justice and poverty alleviation by supporting NGOs that complement the work of Government. This is an effective way for the Ministry to capitalise on the expertise and capacity of NGOs in advancing its critical missions, specifically the care and protection of children and of the disadvantaged in society. A total of \$200,000 allocation for this initiative.
- Monthly Social Protection Allowance or better known as Disability Allowance of \$90 a month under the allocation of \$5 million.
- The Western Disability Centre which serves the needs of persons living with disability in the Western Division by providing specialised services and support will receive \$850,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Economy had also announced that \$300,000 would be allocated within the bus fare subsidy allocation to help assist caregivers, guardians and parents who accompany elderly citizens, adults and children with disabilities for needful travel such as medical checks and going to school, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very welcome move because never before has any Government considered the financial needs of caregivers of the elderly and disabled. Caring for someone can be hard work and takes up a lot of time. It may change one's relationship with the person they are caring for, as

well as limit their freedom and spontaneity. Caring for someone most definitely affects work and education opportunities. It can also be expensive and with low or no income opportunities for these carers.

It takes a caring government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to take such issues into consideration and provide relief. We are proud to be part of a Government that does just that. We, at the Ministry, will set clear criteria to ensure that case by case assessment is done and the most genuine cases are assisted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this point, I wish to also mention that the REACH Project is also a key player in taking services to those who cannot come to us and we thank the Fijian Government for a budgetary allocation of \$300,000 for the administration of the REACH Project as well. This phenomenal outreach programme is especially useful for persons living with disabilities in rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they say the human spirit is one of ability, perseverance and courage that no disability can steal away. It is with this acceptance and strive for inclusive development for all Fijians that the Fijian Government has been moving forward in terms of policies, laws and programmes. We aim to ensure that the development of Fiji does not miss out on the resourcefulness and potential economic participation of any Fijian. We are also adamant that the care and welfare of any Fijian living with disabilities be given equal importance as any other citizen of our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is at its best time to look after the welfare of Fijians living with disabilities. We are equipped and we are ready to take on the new projects and bigger programmes meant to assist people living with disabilities by alleviating poverty and discrimination. We will reach out to Fijians living with disabilities at the community levels to the best of our capacity and to ensure no one who qualifies for the assistance misses out on it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy, in his Budget Address said, and I quote, “The quality of Fiji’s tomorrow will be determined by the pride, the unity and the patriotism we demonstrate today.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is so much of wisdom, so much of passion, so much of hope, so much of determination to see Fiji grow in every sector at every level; an inclusive Fiji, an educated Fiji, a healthy Fiji, a greener Fiji, an empowered Fiji, a digital Fiji and a smart Fiji, and so on.

To achieve this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need every Fijian to take ownership. With this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I register my full support to the 2019-2020 Budget, and I also urge the Honourable Members of the Opposition, please, take your boom boxes home. It will help clean your dirty linens. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro. You have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Cabinet and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise to take this opportunity to respond to the 2019-2020 Budget Address. May I also take this opportunity to express a big *vinaka vakalevu* to all the hardworking civil servants in putting this Budget Estimates together.

Honourable Speaker, I have said this before, and I will say it again, that this FijiFirst Government, the most authoritarian, careless, and inept Government that Fiji has ever seen. This

Budget, Honourable Speaker, drives Fiji further down the road of disaster. Therefore, I do not support it and it must be defeated.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, our people are screaming in pain over:

- Crime;
- Poverty;
- Higher food prices;
- Crisis in the health sector and in the education sector;
- Problems with infrastructure;
- Traffic congestion; and
- The loss of business competitiveness.

And this Budget has done nothing to ease the pain.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, this Government has become numb to the needs of the people of Fiji.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Absolutely.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- They have become deaf to the cries of our people; they have become blind to the crisis facing our country; they have become mute to the abuse of positions they hold in trust for the people.

Indeed, Honourable Speaker, all Fijians except this FijiFirst Government are concerned and worried about our futuristic Fiji. For it is very clear that this Government has lost its way and is on a freefall and this so-called, 'Bainimarama Boom', will only bring us doom.

Honourable Speaker, this FijiFirst Government in previous Budgets and also in this one are only lining the pockets of the rich, they do not care about the poor, is wasting our hard-earned money, is not credible, is irresponsible and therefore unfit to govern.

Mr. Speaker, this FijiFirst Government is lining the pockets of the rich at the expenses of the poor. For example, take the Free Milk Programme, in the last four years the Government paid out about \$13.8 million to CJ Patel and if the current trend continues in the next four years, Government would be paying out about \$20 million, and this allocation is not under requisition, Honourable Speaker, and that means that payments to CJ Patel are processed faster ...

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... and given the priority compared to, for example, Honourable Speaker, under Child Protection and Poverty Benefits and Women Plan of Action, as alluded to by the Assistant Minister are all held under requisition.

Honourable Speaker, according to Maritime communities, like the far-away Lau Group, free milk is not a priority dietary need as compared to the healthy sustainable food supply from the land and sea. Therefore, fibre glass boat and engine is their priority because it is multi-functional and will get them the real value for our money and the quality of life to our people.

Honourable Speaker, the SODELPA Government will review the Free Milk Programme and pursue other programmes that are more beneficial to our children, for example, the Menstrual Health and Hygiene in primary schools for young girls by strengthening the UNICEF WASH programme under the Ministry of Education in the provision of menstrual health hygiene rooms in all primary schools and the use of sustainable, reusable sanitary products so that our young girls “feel proud to be girls”, and not stigmatised by staying home for five days and missing out from schools and other normal activities.

Honourable Speaker, our people get the real value for their money and visible impact in the wellbeing of their young daughters and granddaughters and family as a whole. As a nation, Fiji will make significant impact in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6, as compared to the Free Milk Programme where the target beneficiary is CJ Patel and not our children.

Honourable Speaker, may I also take this time and congratulate Adi Asenaca Caucau Kadre, a young girl in Class 7 at Saint Agnes Primary School, who won the DHL Competition and will be the Ball Carrier in the Fiji vs Wales Rugby in Japan this November.

(Applause)

Honourable Speaker, I move on to the e-ticketing system. This system has brought about a huge burden to our people, particularly the travelling public and the poor. Their problems and frustration is a clear reflection that this program has failed the people.

The bus e-ticketing system has brought about in many instances of fare being overcharged and the processes given to correct this problem is inconvenient and tiresome. For example, Honourable Speaker, fares are being over-charged, like for instance, 10 cents or even a \$1 or \$2 or even sometimes more. So if 1,000 people are over-charged 10 cents daily, that would be about \$100, and weekly \$500, monthly \$2,000, yearly \$24,000 and for four years \$96,000. Honourable Speaker, who gets this extra money? Is it Vodafone or is it the Government?

Honourable Speaker, this type of program further reflects FijiFirst Government’s poor social policy which excludes people from the decision-making processes about their lives through policy and program formulation that creates systems and social structures that are oppressive, disempowering and dependent.

Honourable Speaker, dependence creates poverty, isolation, indignity, powerlessness and marginalisation.

Honourable Speaker, during constituency visit, people have spoken that they prefer the cash system, but this Government is not listening to them. Why? Is it because of the pressure from companies involved who fund FijiFirst?

Honourable Speaker, the SODELPA Government will listen and engage with “Nothing about Us without Us” approach to bring about policies that create enabling environment for our people towards self-independence, integration, empowerment, self-help and self-determination.

Honourable Speaker, SODELPA will review the bus e-ticketing program and have a dual system in place very soon and that will include cash payment.

Honourable Speaker, this FijiFirst Government does not care for the poor as reflected in their policies and programs. For example, let us look at the TELs. The 2019 projection says that there are about 39 students under TELs and by 2020, the total budget is about \$750 million. For these 39,000 students, I strongly believe that more than half come from poor families and also from indigenous Fijians and as such, they will all continue to struggle in future.

On the other hand, I strongly believe that the recipients for the Toppers, which is a full scholarship are mostly, at least, 80 percent are from well to do families and are not from indigenous families.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, developmental policies should be formulated and implemented to ensure that all the different groups of people in our community – the economically disadvantaged group and socially marginalised groups are all given opportunities so that there is balanced development in our country.

This present scholarship policy is discriminatory towards the poor and the indigenous population, and any responsible government cannot afford to turn a blind eye. Other countries, for example, Australia and New Zealand, and even the previous SDL Government engaged in affirmative action to address the specific needs of disadvantaged groups so to balance the developmental gap. And likewise, Honourable Speaker, SODELPA Government will pursue affirmative action to narrow the gap.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, may I remind the other side of the House that the reasons stated for the 2006 *Coup* was to rid Fiji of corruption. The very fact that there is lack of transparency and accountability in the provision of data in the scholarship system is a breeding ground for corruption.

Furthermore, Honourable Speaker, the fact that there has been a huge reduction of \$200 million in the education sector, signals the doom and gloom brought about by the Bainimarama-led Government. And if this Government really care about our people, then it must quickly establish an Education Commission to look into our education sector, otherwise our children's education, our hope, our future leaders, our dreams for Fiji's future is shattered and doomed.

Honourable Speaker, this FijiFirst Government is irresponsible, and is wasting our money, our hard earned taxpayers' money.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- For example, Honourable Speaker, the *TC Winston* Disaster Management Programme was a disaster.

The Help for Home Initiative for the purchase of building materials for repair or construction of homes was given to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to administer, despite the fact that there was the already established Government systems and processes under the Divisional Commissioners and relevant Ministries and Department, like the Regional and Rural Development and the National Disaster Management Division.

Honourable Speaker, according to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report 2016, and 2016-2017, the Ministry was very ill-prepared and faced a lot of challenges when they took on this huge responsibility, which also adversely affected their core work because there was no additional staff or any other much needed resources provided. For example, there was no Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) to guide the Ministry in this huge task.

There was a lot of pressure from key players, like the Honourable Minister for Economy, Solicitor-General's Office, and Vodafone and hardware shops. And this gave rise to discrepancies which was further aggravated due to the continuous change in the directives from decision makers. Honourable Speaker, we wonder who are those decision makers?

Honourable Speaker, the role of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in that Programme was only to register the 39,617 applicants. The issuance of M-PAiSA cards was the responsibility of Vodafone, and Vodafone reported directly to the Ministry of Economy. The Ministry of Economy coordinates with the 10 selected hardware companies for the delivery of building materials.

Honourable Speaker, all records on the total amount used for the Programme, the total amount paid out to each hardware store, or the amount paid up to Vodafone or any other information for the *TC Winston* Help for Home Initiative Rehabilitation Programme is not with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, it is with the Ministry of Economy.

Honourable Speaker that strongly suggests political interference by this FijiFirst Government and because of these, the *TC Winston* Disaster Management was a disaster.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- The supply and delivery of housing materials from the hardware stores was very unreliable and problematic. The whole project was very poorly coordinated, it was a failure, and even today, people are still struggling to build their house and to rebuild their lives.

Mr. Speaker, as for those schools under *TC Winston* Rehabilitation Programme, Primary Schools in Yacata, Qamea, Avea in Vanuabalavu, Nakodu, Mudu in Koro are still not completed. In some cases, community halls are being used as classrooms, with Classes from 1 to 8 all going on at the same time in this big hall without any partition. Imagine the distraction to students and the difficulties teachers face in trying to teach. So how does the Honourable Minister for Education expect quality of education for these children?

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, why should we believe this FijiFirst Government, who continuously make false promises and fails to deliver? Let me give you a few examples.

From the 2015 Budget up until this Budget, the Nabouwalu Town development has been allocated \$15.7 million in total, but no real work has taken place. In my recent visit, just two weeks ago, the only change I saw was the change in the fence around the market and the big boulders in the jetty area acting as the sea wall, some levelling ground work and all these work may have costed at the most, \$2 million. So where have all this money that was budgeted for the development of Nabouwalu Town gone to?

Even basic utilities, like the power supply in the passenger waiting shed at the jetty is still not being connected and this is right from 2015. I had raised this in this House on few occasions.

The intermittent power supply in the Nabouwalu Government Station and nearby villages has not changed for the last 40 years. The 24 hours power supply only came on one week before the Election and during the Election week and after that, all went back to square one.

Mr. Speaker, for the Nasinu-Nausori corridor, a new Nausori Hospital was promised and allocated \$6 million in the 2015-2016 Budget, but nothing happened. And now it has totally disappeared from the Budget.

A swimming pool, waste transfer station from the 2015-2016 Budget totalling \$4 million, but nothing happened in Nasinu. And again this morning, we heard that there would be a swimming pool in Lautoka. Again, in the Budget, there is another allocation for Nasinu swimming pool - \$480,000 being allocated. Do we believe that this will happen after all the false promises?

Furthermore, Honourable Speaker, from 2018 to the 2020 Budget, we have heard about the construction of Barefoot College under the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. As of now, only a sign post is standing on that designated area. Nothing else has happened, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, to those watching TV and those listening to the radio and also to us in here, I had asked these questions before, and I will ask them again, for I believe the answers have not changed. Do you really feel safe today than 10 years ago?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Do you feel secure in your job?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Has the economy improved?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You must be dreaming! Are you confident enough to open a business?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Has your purchasing power increased, Honourable Prime Minister? Are we getting any better healthcare?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Are your children getting better education?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- To the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure, have they fixed and maintained our road and improved our drainage?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Are you satisfied with the behaviour of this FijiFirst Government?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, do you have any hope, any semblance of hope that this FijiFirst Government will make your life better?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, I believe we have all heard a resounding, “no”. It is a big fat, “no”, and at such, Honourable Speaker, I do not support this Budget.

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

I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, the Honourable Vijay Nath. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament; good evening to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, and his team for presenting the 2019-2020 Budget on Friday, 7th June, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services is appreciative of the well-considered Budget it has been allocated to deliver its services. Most importantly, the Ministry will work hard to provide critical services to the most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Ministry has a vast portfolio, however, today I will only speak on the budgetary provisions affecting the maritime sector, particularly for the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), Department of Transport Planning (DTP) and the Government Shipping Services (GSS). The Honourable Minister will highlight the other sectors, namely; the energy, water, works, disaster management, meteorological services and land transport sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an amount of \$22.6 million has been allocated for the maritime transport sector is significant as it has clearly demonstrated the Government's commitment in ensuring safe, reliable and affordable shipping services for all Fijians. This Budget is targeted towards enhancing the quantity and quality of services provided in the maritime transport sector to achieve the target stipulated in the five-year and 20 years National Development Plan.

Priorities in this Plan includes; improving inter-island transportation in the maritime region, constructing jetties, waiting sheds, slipways and navigational aids to facilitate vessel traffic in these areas. Furthermore, increasing the number of vessels in these areas, especially on uneconomical routes and improving safety and service quality are also priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, MSAF has been allocated an amount of \$4.1 million, which is an increase of 7 percent from the 2018-2019 Budget. This funding will prioritise the construction of newly-designed light beacons, focussing on the Natovi, Buresala and Nabouwalu routes that transit the average of 369,000 passengers on yearly basis. This will benefit the maritime industry through the provision of ships safety enhancement; reliable aids to navigation where ships will be able to operate 24 hours, seven days a week; and a guaranteed long-term visibility through an increase in trade. There will also be environmental benefits that will include the increased maritime environment protection, lower fuel consumptions due to accuracy in navigation and safer shipping routes.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, MSAF will continue to improve establishing safety rules and standards for all actors and operators in the maritime sector through the process of implementing the Safe Ship Management System (SSMS).

The most effective component of any safety environment are the capabilities of involved personnel. Further, this funding will also support the achievements of the Government's strategy to provide safe, efficient, reliable and affordable shipping services as outlined in the Government's 5 year and 20 years National Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even though the above confidence building measures in safety of maritime activities are essential, the real motivation behind this Ministry's activities and planning is to develop opportunities for the people of Fiji to contribute effectively towards our economic development. Customer confidence in services, access to markets, availability of modes of travel and, of course, safety of travel are some of the factors in building an environment of progressive economic development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, previously no Government has ever taken the initiative to prioritise the rights of maritime passengers. An additional \$40,000 budget has been allocated for the implementation of the new maritime passengers rights, which will include basic standards for maritime passenger travel, scheduling and fares, thereby providing newfound consumer confidence in the maritime services offered by various providers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, integral to future economic growth is the need to better harness the economic power and opportunities in the maritime and remote areas. The Ministry is focussing on three main initiatives:

1. Enhancing access to maritime areas through the concept of building a commercial hub model;
2. Improving inter-island transport by increasing the number of vessels operating; and
3. Increasing the number of shipping routes, especially to the uneconomical maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government Shipping Services has been allocated a total of \$3 million for the purchase of a new Government vessel that will be an addition to the current 12 Government-owned vessels in operation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are re-fleeting, we are also mindful of the need to either upgrade or build new berthing facilities in the maritime areas where emerging markets are developing.

The Ministry has allocated \$650,000 for the continuing upgrade of the Government wharf and another \$700,000 for the completion of construction of the retaining walls, to ensure movement of goods from maritime islands to the urban markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many of the maritime shipping routes in Fiji are considered uneconomical. To enable a competitive environment for our local vessel operators servicing these uneconomical routes, Government will now increase the contract of vessels under the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme (GSFS) to 15 years, instead of the current duration of two years. This will provide the security desired by vessel operators to venture into purchasing new vessels, resulting in improved service delivery between maritime and urban markets. Mr. Speaker, \$2.317 million has been allocated to the GSFS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the role of the Ministry is not to find new ways to spend money, rather it is to exhibit good stewardship in spending allocated funds towards the development of Fiji and its citizens. This means that the Ministry must also critically look inwards as to how it is expending the resources allocated to it, in providing appropriate services to the people of this nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the importation of shipping vessels already has zero-rated duty. In addition to this, the 2019-2020 Budget provides for the exemption of VAT on the importation of shipping vessels. This will lower the barrier to entry and encourage more private sector investments and new shipping companies by assisting with their cash flow. Secondly, this will improve the quality of ships which will have a positive impact on the passengers.

Additionally the Fijian Government will regulate the shipping industry so that the rights of the travelling public are protected. These incentives and initiatives will improve schedules and implement standards for procedures for cancellation and fares, and encourage new entrants into this sector.

Lastly, I would like to mention that the Ministry has been allocated \$150,000 to assist tradespersons with the Ministry, for example, skilled carpenters, electricians and plumbers employed with us to start up their own business in their respective area of skill.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to respond to the statement made by those from the other side of the House. Honourable Anare Jale in his statement questioned why the allocation towards the GSFS subsidy was not increased. I would like to ensure the Honourable Member that there is a current review of the Scheme which will justify the proposed increase subsidy that the Honourable Jale is referring to.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Jale mentioned about the purchase of a new Government vessel. He also mentioned that he has 37 years of knowledge. I believe in his career of service, he would have understood that there is a process in place, which means the procurement process which is there. In that regard, the current procurement process for vessels is in place and very soon, Honourable Speaker, Sir, you will find during the Committee of Supply what is in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, in the area of maritime safety, shipping, maritime transport and planning, the Ministry is adopting strategies and prioritising, first and foremost, the achievement of NDP targets; modernising and developing services and infrastructure to position for the future; improving information utilisation and coordination amongst various organisations to achieve better planning; and build a better service organisation in service of the people of this nation, especially the most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to state that the Ministry is serious in its approach to maritime sector development and that the Ministry is running a tight ship in fulfilling its obligations to this nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for Economy and his entire Budget Team for a job well done, and I fully support the 2019-2020 Budget. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Simone Rasova. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Ni bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, and good evening. Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House.

I would like to take this opportunity, first time for me to participate in the Budget response for 2019-2020 Budget as a Shadow Minister for Fisheries I would be talking more on the Ministry of Fisheries. I would also like to thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications for the First Reading of the 2019-2020 Appropriation Bill 2019 (Bill No. 7 of 2019).

On this first speech, I think he said that will be coming here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to deliberate and debate on the Appropriation Bill. But then today we have been looking and his been getting hyped up with a lot of decisions or things that we have been saying from this side and I think this is a debate. We will be debating all day for the next four years, Honourable Minister. So, do your best and we will do our worst; you do your worst and we will do our best.

As I was going through the Budget speech, I saw that the Budget itself, most of the things that was said, there were accumulation of things that went on; over 50,000 engagements on *Facebook* which included thousands of comments, questions and suggestions with secondary and tertiary students as

well as the general public that have made the 2019-2020 National Budget the most participatory budget to-date with a record volume of perspectives, ideas and experiences brought to the forefront of Government's consultation. So this is where the National Budget reached its consensus to reduce its total expenditure of \$4 billion plus from that consultation publically; a reduction of almost \$1 billion, boom! That is a boom we are talking about? Going down by almost \$1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, this thing here has been coming up since this morning; the Boom. I was reading the writings on this packet of Boom and it says, "*Effective cleaning power for your laundry.*" Here is something that is written in Indonesian language, but what caught my attention is, "Caution - Keep out of reach of children. In case of eye contact, flush with running water. If swallowed, seek medical advice." Boom! Do not swallow it, please. Do not swallow the Boom. Do not take the Boom that is over here. Can I present it for safekeeping?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget will not secure our nation as a sustainable feature with every dollar of expenditure dedicated to support one of the five pillars of modernity. One, strengthening law and order. What law and order? Suppressions and oppression is not law and order. Protecting our national environment. Hello!

What happened to the Malolo Freesoul, Bua bauxite, Savusavu mangroves, continuation of plastic bag usage with an environment unfriendly and 50 cents penalty only increases revenue for Environment & Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL). It does not help the environment. Empowering young Fijians, yes. That is budget consultation, alright.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- The band will come.

Number five is building certainty is an uncertain world. Well, Fiji has been irresponsible and uncertain for 13 years and this slashed Budget called Boom is definitely building uncertainty in a certain world. What do you think, Mr. Speaker?

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government of Fiji will expect its GDP at constant basic price to be \$7 billion plus and GDP at market price to grow up to \$12.7 billion this year and a GDP growth of 2.7 percent. It must be remembered that former governments had unprecedentedly done better GDP growth too; in 1973, 1979, 1986 and so forth. In 2013 was the highest GDP growth of 5.6 percent for this Government. No more, Boom!

Just as promised, the Government of Fiji had delivered a decade of progress, a decade of development, a decade of prosperity, have done more than set a new record, set a new bar on the expectations of what the nation can achieve. The bar that the Government of Fiji expects all of you to one day surpass. Yes, right! Almost a billion dollar budget cut. Boom, Boom, Boom!

The Government of Fiji is responsible, surely no confidence will grow. No confidence in our nation's progress; no confidence among our people; no confidence among our development partners; no confidence among business owners; no confidence from CEOs heading investment firms to vendors operations, roadside stalls and bus shelters used as fish markets. Is that true, Minister for Fisheries? Yes, they are cutting your Ministry of Fisheries budget by \$3.4 million. In 2018 – 2019, you had about \$20 million, now they have cut it to \$17 million.

The Ministry of Fisheries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is mandated to protect, sustain and manage Fiji's Fisheries, the nation's second leading primary resource-based sector, slashing the Budget by \$356 million will not allow you to do this, Honourable Minister for Fisheries.

You are well-respected businessman from the West, surely you can do something in this. It is a very responsible Budget for the Ministry of Fisheries, with its efforts to achieve a sustainable economy remains steadfast, all right with \$3 million Budget cut.

With this Budget cut, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries has to continue incorporate climate resilience and adaptation efforts through practical and viable adaptation solutions for the benefit of individual fishery business, the sector and the community service.

These efforts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, including combatting illegal national and unregulated fishing, fisheries sector trade subsidies, maximising resource whence building freebies food security, harnessing the full potential of Fiji's Aquaculture and inshore industries through import substitution and that diversification, blue carbon trading, marine diversity, conservation in disaster management, and you are allocated \$17.2 million to do all this above - can do it, cannot do it?

Thanks to the Aid-in-kind of Fisheries inshore compliance, advisory, NZM facts giving Aid-in-Kind and I commend your Program 2, Activity 2 on Offshore Fisheries, Aid in Kind, developing sustainable responsible to that long line fisheries in Fiji to the amount of over half a million.

Programme 2: On Fisheries on Activity 3, Research Resource Assessment in Development with a Budget of \$2,490 million with almost 425,000 is under "R", Honourable Minister, I do not think that it is going to come your way, prove me wrong, come by 2020, this is not going to be used.

Programme 2: On Fisheries on Activity 5, on Extension and Advisory Services, your Budget is about \$4 million with 869 is under "R". Prove me wrong, this will come back in 2020 as in previous years.

Programme 3, there is another "R", budget of \$1.5 million. Aquaculture is the very backbone of food supplement and food security for the people of Fiji, yet \$1.6 million is under "R" and surely the program is uncertain just like this irresponsible and uncertain Budget.

Mr. Speaker, so the total expenditure of the Fisheries Department would be \$17.7 million and \$2.9 million in under "R", fine-tuning our actuals will definitely be \$14.9 million which is almost the same as the Budget or the actuals of the 2017 – 2018, which is about \$15.1. Million.

So you will use at least about \$14,000 in this Budget. Honourable Minister from Kadavu with this typical, irresponsible and uncertain Budget of yesteryears, this current uncertain one, either you will do your best or do your worst, the people of Fiji will be programmed next year, if irresponsible spending continues and side effects of vote buying, banks with little liquidity, people have no confidence in mismanagement of funds.

There is no credibility with no moral authority to Government irresponsible and unprecedented Government of the day. Ministry of Fisheries is also under performance due to lack of resources given to adhering another big blow of such budget of \$3.5 million. People of Savusavu always say, '*mosi sara ga noqu head.*'

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whatever the conflict, is one of the five nations in Asia, I love this: "... one of the Asian Pacific Region, a home of 60 percent of the world's population where income inequality is actually decreasing in a global economy where far too often only the rich are getting richer. The Fijian society is becoming equal, the Bainimarama boom, was the boom for elderly men and women."

You should visit some houses in Southern of Tamavua and Tacirua, their floor is dried mud with no mats, and old shoes, yet \$.037 million base salary of LTA's CEO, the rich getting richer, where

money is leaking out of the country as well. As alluded by Honourable Members, there was a lot of people, as a result of the boom, money leaking out. The way it is going, one day this Government will outsource the position of the Prime Minister and also the Minister for Economy. It defies the Pacific Boom, Honourable Speaker.

Observation on Education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a slash budget of \$300 million for the next financial year, hence the budget allocation is for \$4,670.7 million, a decrease of 9.4 per cent on the last financial year, meaning the completion of the Cyclone Rehabilitation Projects are due to the decrease in budget in the Education, QVS State of Art Building, misleading

Allocation in Head 50 are on the Education list, \$35 million for Ongoing Rehabilitation Construction of Schools and Public Buildings (\$35,000,000) uplifting them to heightened building standards in order to resist severe tropical cyclones in the future.

On a few issues affecting the people of my province in Kadavu Provincial Council at the Tikina of Nakasaleka in Kadavu is on an Improvement Notice carried out by the school premises on 13th March, 2019, have revealed nuisance as stipulated under Part 4, Section 56(h), sub-section 1, 2, 3, 4 of the Public Health Cap. 111, that immediate attention is needed to addressing that. Sir, the inspection finding of the school premises, reveal the following: rusted roof on senior forms classrooms, internal ceiling and missing louvers blades, rusted roofs, missing steps, identified classrooms to access to room for safety and health and broken concrete walls and school kitchen and building and black stained walls, et cetera.

Many nuisances have been written on this Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which cost around \$350,000 and the Kadavu Provincial School has 60 days to adhere to the nuisance stated or the Ministry of Health will issue a closing order to the Ministry of Education. Can the Minister for Education, please, advise the Minister for Health that we have \$35 million on Head 50 under "R" and we have here Ministers who can talk to each other to have that done.

While listening to the Honourable Attorney-General on the Budget Address, the Government of Fiji will be restricting the free note. For Year 1 students in rural schools and maritime region and continue to keep a close eye on it. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wonder if the Minister of Health was consulted here of this restriction of free milk to go into rural maritime. The students in rural and maritime have been getting "fresh is best free milk" for the last 6 to 7 years, from their mums.

The Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Health, what is going on, Honourable Minister? Be on the same page and be responsible. Stomping of the milk box is telling us of excessive milk supply, uncontrolled distribution and over supply by the rich supplier to primary and urban schools of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, to get hefty-cheques after a week of supply or months of supply.

I trust that this has nothing to do with the Honourable Viliame's Gavoka's attack on the superman of C.J. Patel who had resigned, definitely denying free milk in urban schools when numbers are of 10,000 and more than the rural and maritime. Do the mass and see. Responsible and misleading again because of the effect of the slashed \$200 million budget.

Honourable Minister for Education, I will tell you a story this morning when I came by a taxi. The taxi driver told me, "Can you tell the Minister of Education that Class 1 and Class 2 are reading books with English language almost to the level of Form 4 and Form 5. But I think that is already in the pipeline. He is a taxi driver and he is Fijian, and that is what he said.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- To the Honourable Minister for Health, I think the Honourable Qionibaravi said today that the village nurses were getting paid \$200 a month and also the Turaga-ni-Koro - \$100 a month, but I will let you know. I came back from Kadavu the other week and almost all the village nurses out of the 75 villages in Kadavu or maybe they have been paid, but most of them have not been paid for the last six months. But now that you have a new budget which will probably start on 1st August, please include them there and pay their FNPF too.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has a budget allocation of \$89.6 million, a decrease from \$165 million, \$57,000 as Operating Expenditure for capital expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on infrastructure, the Government Jetties at Vunisea and Kavala needs immediate upgrading, probably at Nabouwalu in Bua and Savusavu, Taveuni, Lau, Yasawa, Beqa, Levuka or Lomaiviti. The Government of the day had overlooked that the public needs to get on their fibreglass boats from the jetties to go home. Those big rocks to prevent the waves, the health and safety risk hazard which has been suddenly dealt with over the years. The public have been falling off those slippery rocks and hospitalised.

There is a \$6 million funding from marine activities and I trust the Honourable Minister and Assistant Minister of Infrastructure and Transport will address the oversight on the injury part. Let us be all responsible.

This morning, when the taxi driver told me potholes, I was thinking about the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure and I said, this is an ongoing thing. But then I will tell you one thing, that potholes are all right. It is the potholes that damage the cars, the shock absorbers, and the trucks have accidents. Fix the potholes so that they do not have to have extra costs on that thing. That is what the taxi driver told me this morning. I said, "Oh, my God, I will tell these things.

Now, that you are being penalised, taking the penalty, he gets penalised about three times a day by the policeman on the streets on a motorbike. They are taking the money and they are not fixing the road. So, please do address those.

Access to land and other natural resources, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an important basis of livelihood of the people in this country. Such success should be stable and secure, and if it is not to provide an opportunity for economic growth and act as a vehicle for investment. In seeking to create a strong economy, every country must implement a strategy or planning.

Mr. Speaker, I must thank all Honourable Members who had contributed to the debate and those who had participated over here on my speech. And I would like record my opposition to this Budget. *Vinaka*.

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

I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Members and members of the public; a very good evening to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications in his address to the nation in delivering the 2019-2020 National Budget said, Government is committed to protecting and improving the health of all Fijians, regardless of income or geographical location. The Government aims to achieve this through a wide-reaching and holistic approach from the provision of preventative, curative and rehabilitative medical care and treatment, to the encouragement of healthy lifestyles, to the training and education of a healthy public.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is tasked with achieving Government's vision of a more modern and affordable Fijian healthcare system. The Ministry is actively improving and bolstering its internal capacity, alongside partnering with outside experts to address the specific health needs of the Fijian population. It is seeking out innovative ways to deliver high quality medical services and health education that reaches every Fijian community, no matter how remote. This objective has been further consolidated by the FijiFirst Government and Aspen Hospitals of Australia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to meet today's demand in health services, the Ministry is constructing, upgrading and refurbishing Divisional and Subdivisional Hospitals, Health Centres and Nursing Stations throughout Fiji. This Government is dedicated to filling these new and improved healthcare facilities, along with those that already exist with modern state-of-the-art technology and equipment and skilled medical professionals. Improving the provision of medicinal products, strengthening the health workforce and improving the health information systems are other focussed areas for the Ministry.

While Government is putting extensive resources behind upgrading the nation's healthcare network, it remains dedicated to keeping the out-of-pocket cost of healthcare borne by ordinary Fijians to a bare minimum. From womb to tomb, affordable healthcare is a fundamental and constitutionally enshrined right of every of Fijian.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, initiatives for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in this fiscal year are:

- In improving the administration and quality of healthcare and medical services throughout Fiji, the human resource responsibility of doctors has been transferred back to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.
- Community health workers currently based in villages and settlements are now receiving an allowance and will soon be provided with a dedicated dispensary to house essential medications.
- The dispensary will be equipped with a PC to capture patient data to support the Patient Information System held at Divisional Hospitals. These prefabricated cubicles will be equipped with external USB ports for villages and communities to get free access of charging their cell phones.
- The Ministry continues to enhance access for patients seeking overseas treatments, particularly for cancer and cardiac treatments that are not yet available in Fiji. The Aspen Hospital, once fully operational, will provide procedures and care in this respect.
- The Ministry will continue to strengthen the delivery of secondary prophylaxis, increased community awareness, define the epidemiology and monitor the burden of rheumatic heart diseases by allocation of funds, provide funding for aircraft charter to meet the increased demand for medical evacuation of high-risk patients, especially those residing in rural and maritime areas.

- The Ministry will continue outsourcing janitorial and security services for all health facilities.
- The Ministry will continue to address the rise of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) by strengthening preventative and outreach programmes relating to NCDs, HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis, family health, adolescent health, child health development, environmental health and mental awareness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I look forward to continue working together with the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, the entire Ministry staff and allied workers in taking forward the Ministry's vision of developing a healthy and productive population.

With those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the 2019-2020 Budget, and I thank you most sincerely.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for his contribution to the Debate.

Honourable Members, we will now conclude tonight's proceedings and I want to thank you for your forbearance and your co-operation during the Debate today.

We will continue tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m. The House is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.10 p.m.