

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 15TH JULY, 2022

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 15TH JULY, 2022

The Parliament met at 8.15 p.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josai Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs,
Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister of Economy, Civil Service,
Communications and Housing and Community Development
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Defence, National Security and
Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala, Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations
and Youth and Sports
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment
Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and
Mineral Resources
Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and Local
Government
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty
Alleviation
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity,
Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management
and Meteorological Services
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Selai Adimaitoga, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. George Vegnathan, Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry
Hon. Dr. Salik Ram Govind
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Sachida Nand
Hon. Rohit Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Howard Robin Politini
Hon. Ratu Naiqama Tawake Lalabalavu
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Anare Jale
Hon. Mitieli Bulanauca
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
Hon. Tanya Waqanika
Hon. Jese Saukuru

Hon. Ratu Tevita Navurelevu
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu
Hon. Simione Rokomalo Rasova
Hon. Peceli Waqairatu Vosanibola
Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau
Hon. Inosi Kuridrani
Hon. Jone Atonio Rabici Seniloli
Hon. Dr. Mere T. Naulumatua
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua
Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua

Absent

Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Nagata, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Jale Sigarara, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 13th May, 2022, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Honourable Members, I welcome you all to tonight's sitting for the delivery of the National Budget Address by the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development. I also have the pleasure to welcome all those watching tonight's live proceedings on television and the internet from the comfort of their homes.

Honourable Members, the National Budget Address and the subsequent Budget debates are significant events in the parliamentary calendar. The National Budget Address enables the Government to articulate and present its key objectives, policies and forecast for the next financial year. In the same vein, tonight's event is essential and vital for Parliament to fulfil its constitutional obligation.

At this juncture, I wish to advise all honourable Members that the Business Committee, in due consideration of the parliamentary convention and tradition, has unanimously approved to exempt the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy from the ordinary speaking time limitations for the delivery of the Budget Address tonight.

Honourable Members, on the issue of the vacant seat of the honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, please, take note that I will address Parliament on this issue at the next Sitting.

BILL - FIRST READING

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Orders 99 and 84(1), I move:

That the 2022-2023 Appropriation Bill 2022 (Bill No. 27 of 2022), be now read a first time.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, hand copies of the Bill to the Secretary-General.

(Copies of the Bill handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, Housing and Community Development to deliver the National Budget Address.

2022-2023 APPROPRIATION BILL 2022

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, good evening to you and everyone else listening in and, of course, the honourable Members of Parliament.

Leaders from across the Pacific came to Fiji this past week and we are proud and honoured to host them in our capital. We did not need to say it, but our message to the world is clear - Fiji, the hub of the Pacific is open - and we are laser-focused on a resilient recovery and future.

This is the fourth National Budget that we have announced since the beginning of the pandemic. This Budget is different from the three before it because the worst economic crisis in our history is over, and our recovery is here. We promised you in the darkest days of the crisis that our economy would not just recover, but it would emerge from the pandemic with pace and resilience. Through Government's foresight and decisive leadership, and with the tremendous support and participation of the Fijian people, we delivered on that promise. This Budget is possible because of what we did together.

The blueprint for our next financial year is as prudent, responsible and visionary as any we have announced. It rests on the pillars of infrastructure, education and health, and is built by the values that our honourable Prime Minister has made his moral and political mission - family, security, justice, true democracy and equal opportunity. This Budget creates the certainty that our businesses need to plan, invest and hire, and as prices for food, fuel, freight and fertilizer remain extremely unpredictable, this Budget provides relief for the families who need it most. It is wholly the strength and speed of our economic recovery that makes all of these possible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the many ways to assess an economy, the most important for working people are growth, jobs and wages. That is as true for Fijians as it is for the citizens of the largest economies on earth and through the first half of 2022, Fiji is growing its economy - adding more jobs and raising wages faster than we have ever done.

The economy is conservatively projected to grow by 12.4 percent this year; its highest rate of growth ever. Some estimates put our growth projections much higher. Employment numbers as at

May 2022 indicate a total of more than 171,000 employed in the formal sector. That means that 92 percent of employees are back to work in the formal sector compared to pre-COVID-19.

The demand for labour rose steadily to May, increasing by an astonishing 168.3 percent on the year. Increased vacancies were advertised across most sectors and the tourism sector led the surge, which is wonderful news. We expect the June numbers to be even better.

Since January, we have welcomed 205,527 tourists as of June 2022 – almost 50 percent of the total for the same period in 2019. Visitor arrivals for June 2022 stood at 62,130; this is almost 73 percent of the June 2019 arrivals. June visitor arrivals are the highest we have ever seen since COVID-19.

Australian arrivals in June 2022 stood at almost 97 percent of June 2019. New Zealand arrivals in the month of June 2022 was 66 percent of June 2019 and US arrivals stood at 78 percent. July is looking very strong as well. We expect to easily exceed our target of 500,000 tourists arrivals in 2022, which is 55 percent of pre-pandemic arrivals and that should mean more than \$1.3 billion in total tourism earnings. The boom, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is back, and it is what we call a *Bula Boom*.

Cumulative revenues collection as at 30th June, 2022 amounted to \$1.96 billion, of which \$1.5 billion were tax revenues. June tax collections exceeded the forecast by \$11.6 million, as tourism recovery bounced back strongly, and most importantly, Sir, the wages paid to our people are up by \$210 million - 15 percent higher compared to the same six-month period last year - \$210 million in the pockets of our taxi drivers, tourism employees, airport staff, factory workers, farmers and families. Mr. Speaker, Sir, every dollar of this is owed to our economy's once-in-a-century comeback from a once-in-a-century crisis.

No society, Mr. Speaker, Sir, stumbles its way to record breaking growth or to these levels of wage increases and job numbers. We consistently told the people of Fiji what it would take - nothing less than decisiveness and nothing short of solidarity. Your Government led with decisiveness where it mattered most. You, the people, supplied that solidarity and made our policies practically possible.

I do not believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that anyone watching or listening needs a lecture on what was required of them personally to get us here. The teams we led within Government worked far too hard for me to stand here and pretend any of it was easy. I have spoken with far too many families and far too many communities to believe for one second that it was painless. But if there had been a faster or surer route to recovery, our honourable Prime Minister would have taken it without hesitation.

The road we paved was the most direct possible out of the pandemic. We are proud of where it led and Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not the least bit surprised by it. We thank our people for their patience, for their cooperation and for their faith in the promises that we made because while our recovery was possible through the Government's plan, its success depended on our people, on each of you watching tonight. It depended on you getting both jabs of the vaccine, plus boosters. It depended on you staying home when that was necessary. It depended on your returning to work when that was possible, and its continued success depends on all of us keeping the country on the course that we have set.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in March of 2020, we clamped down hard on the first outbreak and brought ourselves a full year without the virus. We then not only secured enough vaccines for our people ahead of most countries and at no cost, I might add, we deployed them at the speed of science and we mandated the full vaccination of job holders and recipients of unemployment assistance. We kept paying social welfare and paid out \$0.5 billion in Unemployment Assistance and indirect social

support, more support than any other government has ever paid at any other time and we kept the bones of our economy strong enough to support our recovery so that when the borders open, our people's jobs are ready and waiting.

Tonight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will explain how our actions achieved a recovery and how we will capitalise on the opportunity it brings because we believe we can do it even better. That is the good news, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The bad news is that, even though wages are rising, so are prices due to challenges Fiji did not cause and cannot control. Thanks to our recovery, Sir, right off the bat - this Budget builds more buffers to the price increases crises and long term, it commits us to the path that our honourable Prime Minister has promised will yield a stronger Fiji.

First, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will announce our expenditures and provide a comprehensive update on our fiscal strategy coming out of the pandemic. Then because it is, indeed, our most urgent priority, we will review a package of imported inflation mitigation measures to defend our people from the record high prices of food. We will detail new investments in infrastructure, such as roads, water and telecommunications. We will lay out a series step up in tertiary education support, highlight some of the important and innovative strategies to expand the rich and quality of healthcare and talk through some exciting new support to our farmers. And we will end with a broad overview of important highlights from other Ministries and sectors, a suite of policies that will make business and investment easier than ever in Fiji, and an announcement of a low and sustained corporate tax regime.

The policies and allocations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this Budget are based on every conversation and consultations we have held within Government, with businesses, with communities and with families this year and the years prior. For the first time in our history, our Ministry of Economy travelled to what may be called the deep rural areas of Vanua Levu - to Loa Village and Tawake Village in the *Tikina* of Tawake. They showed us wonderful hospitality and more importantly, made productive contributions. They are able to watch this announcement right now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, thanks to *Walesi*. I would not have the time, Sir, to share each of the stories of those who joined our consultations, but know that all of you who participated in this process are the beating heart of this Budget.

In some ways this is two budgets in one. Its immediate inflation mitigation package will be reviewed in December or early next year in consideration of the volatility of the global shocks it seeks to address. But the bulk of this Budget is made up of long term policies that enable a sustained, assertive, consistent and wide-reaching recovery built over a multi-year period, and at the end of that timeline is a resilient Fiji, a greener and bluer Fiji and a Fiji that creates better jobs, pays higher wages and gives every Fijian even greater confidence in the future.

Because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot base our entire plan around a fear of future shocks and crises, we have to see far beyond our noses, we have to harness confidence, we have to plan for the opportunity, the sort of opportunity that inspires our young people and our dynamic workforce so that we can keep Fijian talent here in Fiji and that creates solutions that we might have thought impossible even a generation ago. This Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, does that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the pandemic, Government literally became the economy, or the least majority of it, through stimulus packages that supported businesses and created activity everywhere we could. We made the strategic decision to borrow \$2 billion from credible financial institutions at extremely concessionary terms, which means rock-bottom interest rates. Most of these loans have major grant components.

In effect, Sir, that means we do not have to pay back more than half of the amount we borrowed, of course, we took it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Any government that turns down grant-funding that has no strings attached at no hidden costs and that will benefit its people should be sacked by those same people the very same day. That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is what we call common-sense. We have always brought that same common-sense, responsible and disciplined philosophy to our borrowing strategy.

At the end of 2006, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's debt-to-GDP ratio is 53.5 percent. It rose to 56.2 percent by 2010. Then it entered a steady downward trajectory, falling to 43.5 percent in 2016-2017, a decline of almost 13 percentage points in six years. Why did the debt-to-GDP ratio decline? The maths, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our normal GDP rose much faster than our debt levels, rising from \$5.3 billion to \$11.8 billion during the same period, notwithstanding *TC Winston* and 13 other cyclones. Amidst all of these, as I have mentioned - *TC Winston* and 13 cyclones that followed, the devastation we suffered required higher levels of borrowing to build back better. We had to pay now to build resilience in order to avoid much higher costs down the track. The debt-to-GDP rose to 48.4 percent by 2018-2019.

It was an injustice that Fiji had to borrow to rebuild from climate-driven disasters that we did not cause, and that was a point we made relentlessly to the world's financial institutions. I have explained the cost of *TC Winston* hundreds of times to thousands of people. Mr. Speaker, Sir, all of that advocacy worked. The world heard us and we were able to access more affordable finance at lower interest rates. From 2018 to 2020, the average cost of our overall debt portfolio began to fall from 6 percent in July 2019 to 5.6 percent in July 2020. This trend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, made it obvious that the debt-to-GDP ratio alone was not the only measure that mattered, the cost of our debt mattered just as much.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID's economic impact was worse than *TC Winston*, *TC Yasa*, *TC Harold* and every other storm that struck us since 2016, combined. Tax revenues fell by 50 percent on average every month. We lost almost \$1.4 billion in tax revenue over 12 months. So, in two years, we lost almost \$2.8 billion in tax revenue. During the same period, we had other new non-tax inflows, like Budget Support Grants and Divestment Receipts from EFL that partially mitigated this revenue decline. So, we borrowed to maintain public expenditures at around \$3.7 billion which includes the over \$500 million provided in unemployment support and other relief measures.

The average cost of our overall debt portfolio as of July 2022 is 4.4 percent - a reduction, Sir, of almost one-quarter from pre-pandemic levels. That translates to, at least, \$100 million annual savings on interest payments. Interest payments alone, a savings of \$100 million. This was mainly due to Government's ability to negotiate access to lower cost policy-based loans, concessional financing and lower domestic yields over the pandemic period.

Certain politicians and their lackeys love talking about debt, but they refuse to talk about these falling servicing costs. They refuse to acknowledge the imperative of borrowing during a global crisis, and worst of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they refuse to talk about the alternative, let alone offer one. They refuse to tell the people what would have happened if the Government had not stepped up and kept the economy going. Their deliberate distortion of reality is worse than uninformed. It is dishonest.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us tell you, oddly enough, I think the Fijian people do not need to hear it from me because they know it is the only Opposition Members who sit in this Chamber, their Party hacks and their various mouthpieces in the media and elsewhere who need to wake up and

smell the coffee. The pandemic hit hard everywhere, but as the United Nations Secretary-General recently said only few days ago at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) where our honourable Prime Minister chaired the session and was the Chair of the Forum, small island economies were, by far the most, vulnerable. These vulnerabilities are inherent and unavoidable. They have to do with the size, scale and relative isolation of our countries.

Unfortunately, we cannot fix our place on the map, even if we wanted to. Pre-COVID, the Fijian economy is coming out of nine straight years of economic growth. Agriculture production was at record highs, tourism was at record highs, manufacturing was at record highs and new sectors like business process outsourcing were gaining steam. The pandemic caused our economy to shrink by 17.2 percent in 2020 which took our GDP back to 2015 levels.

However, given our expected rate of growth following the resumption of tourism last December, we should fully return to pre-COVID level of GDP by 2024. Without the Government's stimulus package, the closure of our borders and introduction of necessary health restrictions, it would have created a socio-economic crisis and inflicted decades long of economic devastation. People would have been cast into abject poverty. We would have depleted our foreign reserves. We very well would have lost our national carrier and be left with no planes flying visitors to our shores. Hotels would be closed and sold off.

Right now, the only blooming business would be debt collectors and the best job available would be for people who board up shop windows. We would see riots in the streets and that anger would be justified because people would have had no food to eat. Rising prices, plus jobless people, plus shattered businesses would add to the worst socio-economic unrest in history. Ten, even twenty years from now, we still would find ourselves recovering.

We borrowed prudently to prevent that. Every government on earth that could borrow did so for the same reason, and we did not just starve off disaster, we prepared actually for the future. Any objective business owner understands that Government took on that debt so that they, the businesses, would not have to. The private sector in Fiji holds a debt of \$10 billion. If Government had not borrowed money offshore and then injected that liquidity into our domestic financial system, private sector interest rates would have gone through the roof to as high as 10 percent. That means, we prevented debt servicing cost of businesses from skyrocketing by upwards of \$1 billion which would have made serious investment virtually impossible for years to come, and we managed that well within the bounds of prudence.

At the height of the pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government worked closely with financial institutions and the Reserve Bank of Fiji, to grant a moratorium on more than 30,000 private sector loans. A total of more than \$3 billion is COVID-19 related. We thank the banks for their cooperation and support to our businesses. It has certainly paid off. Most of these loans are now being paid back - principal and interest. Only a tiny sliver of these loans are not serviceable and at a negligible cost. That means, businesses are not only open, they are doing well enough to make good on their loan payments. We tie them over when it mattered most so that businesses did not shut down, people did not lose homes and jobs did not disappear forever.

While our opponents speak about debt, they ignore the robust economic activity that allows us to manage that debt. These businesses are open, these homes have stayed with their families and our people are working. That is what the Opposition did not tell us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or the general public, that is what they refused to even admit.

Our private sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, did more than survive. Businesses are seizing on their recovery, adding steams through multi-million dollar investments. In the coming months, Sir, we

expect over \$1 billion in domestic-private sector investments to commence, which include investments from the challenged group - B.L. Naidu & Sons Ltd; Vinod Patel & Co. Ltd; New World Ltd (Fiji); Punja & Sons Ltd; Carpenters; Lion One; EFL; Vodafone; BSP Life; FMF; TFL; Digicel; Sheraton; Pullman Hotels & Resorts; Fiji Water; 18 Degrees Water; Vatulele Hotel Group; Grace Road Group; Rups Big Bear; Supreme Fuel; P. Meghji Trading PTE Ltd; Damodar Brothers (Films) Ltd; Rups Big Bear; CJs Group; and McDonald's, put together with other industry players, will be showing over \$1 billion worth of confidence in our economy and, indeed, in our recovery.

Government also borrowed money so that workers being paid off from the tourism sector and the industry and other sectors could succeed at entrepreneurial ventures at opening small and medium businesses and other enterprises. The results speak for themselves - hundreds of SMEs are open and thriving throughout the country, creating jobs and contributing to Fiji's GDP every single day. None of these would have been possible without the Government working throughout the pandemic to strengthen the resilience of both our formal and informal sectors.

Smart borrowing on our part made that happen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our opponents did not tell you that either. Because of the extraordinary actions we took, domestic inflation is at 5.1 percent, while globally it is projected to exceed 7 percent. The Fijian dollar, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was not devalued. Imagined then what families were paying for bread with a decline in national currency. Foreign reserves hit a record high this week at \$3.62 billion for 8.4 months' worth of import *kava*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these represents our ability to purchase and import goods from other countries. If these reserves were low, Fijians would not have access to essentials like fuel, cooking gas, clothing and every other import we rely on. Liquidity is over \$2 billion. Domestic interest rates are at record lows. An Economist from ANZ has predicted 23.2 percent growth this year, I hope he is right, and Westpac projects 12.9 percent, both higher than our relatively conservative estimate which is about 12.4 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was our purpose-built pandemic response that built a foundation of this recovery. But our greatest achievement is not what we delivered, it is what we prevented. Many developed and developing nations are facing downward recession, Fiji actually is not. Many nations are facing double digit inflation, even as high as 80 percent, Fiji is in the single digits. Many currencies have been devalued, Fiji's dollar has not been. Many countries are still closed to tourism at this very moment, Fiji is opened.

Many countries have vaccinated fewer than half of their eligible populations, the Fijian adult population is virtually all vaccinated. Some people in other countries are waiting for days for fuel and cooking gas, Fijians are not. Some people are literally starving to death, Fijians are not. Open a newspaper and read what is happening around the world, Mr. Speaker, Sir. See the images, listen to the stories and you will understand that billions of people would like to be in our shoes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to share an account what is happening right now in Sri Lanka. A lady called Chamila Nilanthi, a 47 year old mother of two, spent three days lining up to get kerosene in the Sri Lankan town of Gampaha, North East of the capital of Colombo. Two weeks earlier, she spent three days in a queue for cooking gas but came home with none and she says, "I am totally fed up and exhausted. I do not know how long we have to do this." In China, there are protests over frozen bank accounts and people continue to live under crushing of COVID-19 restrictions. The largest street demonstrations ever are underway in Cuba right now due to severe food shortages and arduous COVID-19 restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that suffering is actually real. It is heart-breaking and is playing out globally. If we had bungled our pandemic response, Fijians would face the full brunt of this same

headwinds. Instead, we are recovering. We can respond to protect our people and there is not an economy anywhere in the world, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would bet on more than ours in this particular moment.

We never strove for short-term gains, we never treated elections as a yardstick for making economic policy announcements. That would be grossly irresponsible and a slap to the face of ordinary Fijians. We put the economy and the long-term livelihoods of our peoples first. We put the economic, financial and social security of Fiji and Fijians first. Many in and outside of this Chamber will not admit any of this because they oppose the similar strategy that delivered it.

They argued, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Government should let the economy fend for itself, cut spending, cut Civil Service salaries and ours, abandon our national carrier and leave Fijian businesses at the mercy of the market for loans. If that was not enough, they wrote off our assistance as freebies. They then protested our vaccination policies and our borders reopening. They planned, if you can call it a plan, Mr. Speaker, Sir, should have set alarm bells ringing in every household. Sir, if the Opposition had their way right now, Fiji would be worse than Sri Lanka. There was a recipe for an isolated country, a collapse in economy and a people in crisis. But we did not listen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, even on the most difficult days, we did not listen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me correct them. We did listen initially but we stopped because we could not believe what we were hearing. We could not believe the shallowness of their understanding, their inability to grasp basic economics and their apparent lack of concern for the people in Fiji, who work hard everyday to build a life for themselves and their families. Thank God, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one listened to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has that taught us? The Opposition and political opponents makes memes, this Government makes jobs. The Opposition cares about their jobs, we care about the people. The Opposition raises petty political objections, we actually raise wages. We serve the people, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by delivering historic economic victory after historic economic victory. The Opposition serve themselves, not so much out of a potent mix of incompetency and political power seeking, they are politicians before all else and the only jobs they care about are their own. Despite all of their dire doomsday warnings, the reality of the matter is that, if we turn to the global market right now to raise funds, credible financial institutions would still lend to us without hesitation. We are not talking about unscrupulous loan sharks here and there, these institutions do not throw money around like the National Bank of Fiji did before it collapsed. These are the most sophisticated multilateral and bilateral lenders in the history of human civilisation and they remain confident in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they may have seen that every dollar we borrowed, we used wisely - they have seen that. We took a market system development lens to our recovery initiatives in order to empower the private sector. Once again, we worked with bilateral and multilateral partners to begin building more resilient, flexible and efficient supply chains in industries via an extensive network of businesses, government agencies, apex bodies and research bodies. That critical planning has meant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we can now rely on a strong private sector to lead economic growth, while the Government ensures macroeconomic stability, economic confidence building and improving even further the ease of doing business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we had bowed down to political opponents demands to stop borrowing, the private sector would have not had any cheap finance to draw upon. Businesses would be paying up to 15 percent interest rate in the current debts and majority of them would have been finished and no question. That is what our political opponents consistently cannot seem to comprehend or worse, do not care to comprehend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition are not business people. They complained about our 15 years in Government, but a number of them have been in politics since the 1980s and 1990s. The world has changed, and they have not, and if you cannot understand what business needs are in the 21st century, you cannot run an economy and you cannot lead a modern country.

For the sake of honesty and fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope we can recognise how foolish it is to claim that Fiji is on par with nations undergoing financial and humanitarian crisis. Fiji is in a strong fiscal position post-pandemic than Sri Lanka's before the pandemic, by a long margin. That was exactly what Dumith Fernando, the former Chairman of the Colombo Stock Exchange said in Fiji, at a lecture earlier this month. Frankly, to compare our situation to theirs is insulting, not to us in Government, but to those who are suffering because it trivializes what they are actually going through now. They have absolutely no compassion for that. We did not let that happen, and we will not let it happen, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we saved most of our businesses from going under when it mattered most as we have promised, we now expect the private sector to step up and play a much bigger role in our recovery. Apart from the over \$1 billion loan in upcoming domestic investments, we have also set the stage for massive foreign investment that will create development, jobs and income in the tourism, manufacturing, mining and BPO sectors.

The latest findings show us that private sector credit is accelerating. During the first five months of this year, over \$1 billion worth of loans have been disbursed to the private sector, which means the engine of business led-growth is tuned for high and rising performance. Through this Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is only borrowing to fund capital expenditure, as we have restored the discipline fiscal balance that ensures we only borrow to build, not to cover operational expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you may remember that past Governments even without the catastrophe of a global pandemic, took on debt just to pay civil servants. They did not need a global crisis like a pandemic to create a fiscal one for themselves. Safe to say, they would have sunk to the bottom of Suva Harbour with the once in a hundred year event like COVID-19 on their shoulders.

To meet the crisis with the powerful and necessary stimulus, this Government announced a 20 percent deficit in 2020-2021, that fell to 16.2 percent in the current financial year. Tonight, it falls to a manageable 7.4 percent through a budget that is as decisive for our recovery as is it disciplined. And over the next two years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will be brought below 3.0 percent and bring our debt-to-GDP ratio below 70 percent within the next seven years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, true to our commitment to fiscal consolidation and fiscal responsibility, we are reducing our deficit level, as I have said, to 7.4 percent of GDP. Our forecast of total revenue stands at \$2.9 billion and our total expenditure at \$3.8 billion, or net deficit of \$872 million and debt-to-GDP projected to hit 85 percent.

The Government's role in the recovery moving forward is two-fold - one, we have to ensure that the private sector has the flexibility to deliver what it knows how to deliver and two, we have to ensure that growth reaches every corner of the country through landmark investments in education, health, agriculture, social protection and, indeed, infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the Mini Budget announcement, commodity prices have remained extremely volatile. Some have recently taken a dip, they could easily rocket back up tomorrow, and those increases do not impact us in isolation. When fuel prices rise, freight prices rise also and the price of the food that we import rises as well. When fertiliser prices rise, farming costs rise and so do food prices. It

takes an elementary grasp of supply chains to understand this. Fiji does not grow onions, we do not grow wheat, so when food and fuel prices rise due to wars far from home, so does our import bill and so does the cost for local households. Internal cartage costs increased for cane trucks, bus companies, taxi operators. This means that the local crops are affected because they rely on fertiliser to grow and have to be transported to the market in cars, trucks and vans, and those vehicles need fuel to run.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not pulling oil out of wells or in Fijian waters, and ships and trucks do not run on coconut oil. While it is not the only cause, the Russian war on Ukraine is the most immediate driver of this price increase crisis because it has cut off vital supplies of food, particularly cereals and energy. President Putin knows the high cost he is inflicting on Fiji and other countries because our honourable Prime Minister has directly told him that, for which our honourable Prime Minister has, indeed, been widely commended. The decision to end the war rests entirely with Russia to be sure, but it would be cowardice for Fiji to suffer in silence along with other vulnerable nations and will continue to use its voice to urge peace. Until such time, we have to contend with the world as it is, not as we wish it would be. Aside from cost crises driven by shortages, inflation is also skyrocketing globally, as I have mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in part due to disruptions in the supply chain that began during the pandemic and have created scarcities. Fiji is feeling this as well through the goods that we import.

Over the last two years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a period where they have mattered more than ever, Government's social protection measures never waned. This Budget continues the more than half-a-billion dollars' worth of initiatives previously announced to aid those most vulnerable, which includes the direct subsidy of water and electricity for those earning less than \$30,000 annually, subsidies that make bus fares more affordable, the removal of market vendors' fees that continues, the removal of export-related fees that continues, and the removal of 20 cents fuel levy that continues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an additional line of defence, we have also removed VAT from that expanded list of 21 essential items in the Mini Budget that continues. This includes sugar, flour, rice, canned fish, cooking oil, potatoes, onion, garlic, baby milk, powdered milk, liquid milk, dhal, tea, salt, soap, soap powder, toilet paper, sanitary pads, tooth paste, kerosene and cooking gas. These all remain VAT exempt moving forward. This unprecedented exemption measure has already saved consumers \$50 million since its implementation on 1st April, 2022, and will save \$163 million over the course of the year - \$163 million shaved off the top of the grocery bills and kept in the pockets of the families who need it the most, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This has cushioned the blow.

We earlier reduced fiscal and import excise duties on over 1,600 items, reduced departure tax, reduced fuel duty, removed ECAL, Stamp Duty, Service Turnover Tax and business licences. So far, that has saved an estimated \$600 million in taxes that would otherwise be paid. Fiji's price controls have also prevented some commodities from becoming entirely unaffordable for many families, while not pricing those commodities so low that suppliers no longer wish to export them to us.

Most countries do not have these built-in crisis buffers. We do and, indeed, they are working, Sir. Our price controls and VAT removal, of course, have not stopped the confluence of global crisis, driving up prices and they have offered our citizens some protection. Just to give an example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, fuel in Fiji is about FJ\$3.44 per litre on average. In New Zealand, it is FJ\$4.52 per litre. As prices go higher, we have sought other ways to protect the people as much as we can.

Tonight, we unveil a six-month \$60 million of what we call 'Inflation Mitigation Package' to add another buffer between our people's budgets and the rising cost of goods. Through this Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will provide direct cash assistance to the most vulnerable Fijian families based on the number of children in each household. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this applies to all children from newborns to those in Year 13.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Carrot!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I hear calls of carrot, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is the level, I will digress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wish to address the Fijian people and we wish them to hear what others are saying. This applies to all children from newborns to those in Year 13, and this will be assessed in December based on where food prices stand at that time as we expect prices to stabilise or even decrease within the year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will rollout this assistance through an online application process in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, for Fijian families with a combined annual income of \$50,000 or less. We will provide \$1 per day per child in each family, or \$7 a week or around \$30 per month, making for a total of \$180 per child for the next six months. A family with three children, for example, will receive \$540 in groceries assistance over the next six months. Any family making under \$50,000 a year can access this assistance, even including civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that bump is \$1 per day per child, so that is \$30 a month. For six months, Sir, it is \$180 and that is per child. So, if you have three children, you do the mathematics, you will come up with the amount for the three children. If you have six children, you multiply \$180 by six and that bump makes a big difference. It can mean the difference between a fish head and a full fish. It can mean the difference between a full chicken and a soup pack. It is a difference between fresh fruit or no fruit at all. It is the difference between nutrition or unhealthy snacks, and that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a difference that matters.

Those who have been taking part in the EFL subsidised electricity initiative, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the water subsidy initiative and the bus fare subsidy initiative will be eligible for the subsidy immediately as the simple vetting process will be in place. An online platform will be developed similar to the vaccination registration process whereby parents will apply online. Alternatively, Government will set up registration centres for Fijians to apply in person on a needs basis. For those without connection to electricity and in the rural and maritime areas, we will make this assistance accessible through the Ministry of Education and application will be done through the schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will also apply to families where the children are below school age too and they can also apply. We, recently during a consultation, met a lady who have four children below the age of five years. So all her four children will be eligible for that.

To assist pensioners with the current high inflation environment, all existing social welfare, government pension and aftercare fund recipients will receive a payment of \$180 over the next six months period. It is expected, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that around 100,000 Fijians will benefit from this initiative who are on what we call 'social assistance recipients'. Similar to the cash support provided to the vulnerable Fijians, it is based on the assistance of \$30 per month for the first six months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just because fuel prices are rising it does not mean that our people have any less reason to travel to work, school or to access essential services. Their travel must be as affordable and reliable as we possibly can make it. That is why from 1st August, 2022, Government will directly subsidise bus fare by 10 percent across the board for, at least, the next six months. We are taking all these costs because we do not believe it is fair to place this burden on the backs of the bus companies. So when the bus rider pays this new discounted fare, the Government will pay the difference directly to the bus companies. To pick up that 10 percent cost, \$6 million has been allocated in this Budget. We will make an advance payment to all bus companies for the month of August based on previous records and reconcile with the acquittal and e-ticketing data every month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have not forgotten our tertiary students. Regardless of whether they are not TELS or Toppers recipients, all Fijian students enrolled in any tertiary institution - Fiji National University (FNU), University of the South Pacific (USP), University of Fiji and any of the other approved institutions, will receive a payout of \$180 in a six month period to be paid out in two phases. These include Montfort Boys Town, Nadave and Sangam Fiji. About 30,000 students are expected to benefit from this Scheme also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, strong economies and recoveries for that matter built a strong infrastructure. Now it will be a terrible time to turn away from managing and building the roads, bridges and jetties that connect the country, sustaining our recovery of the long-term demands landmark infrastructure investments. It is the smartest way to support a private sector land recovery. It is a powerful way to create more livelihoods and support our farmers in rural and maritime communities. The most important way, we continue to build Fiji's climate resilience.

We need more roads not fewer, and those roads must be maintained to the highest possible standards, especially as rain, storms and sea level rise intensify. People need to get to work, crops need to get to markets and students need to get to school.

Over the next five years, Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is undertaking a capital works programme valued at \$2.5 billion. In the 2022-2023 financial year, FRA is allocated a total sum of \$376.7 million for the effective management and development of Fiji's road network - \$13.8 million will cater for the Authority's operational cost and \$362.9 million is to carry out a comprehensive capital works programme to keep up with Fiji's growing need for new infrastructure and to maintain our existing road network.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$60 million is allocated for FRA's Ongoing Maintenance Programme - \$50 million is allocated for the renewal and replacement programme, and a total of \$31.4 million is allocated for ongoing bridge construction for the Naseyani Bridge in Rakiraki, Vunikawakawa Bridge in the Northern Division, Matawalu Bridge, Waidalice Bridge, Vuniyasi Bridge, Yaqara Bridge, most of which will be completed by September 2022 of this year. In addition, funding is also allocated for the construction of the new Toga Bridge in Nausori.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has allocated \$15 million to help fulfil its commitment to connect our rural communities to our economic centres and key public services. These communities must have the security and connection to the rest of the country that a robust road network will provide, and Government will allocate funding to pay new access roads to previously inaccessible communities. Sir, \$3 million is allocated for the upgrade of the Lagi to Tawake Village Road and a new road between Tawake to Wainika in Vanua Levu near Udu Point. Funding is also provided for a new road to Nasauvakarua in the interior of Viti Levu. The FRA is also planning to cut the new road from Namosi to Nasauvakarua Village. Sir, \$1 million is allocated for the commencement of design and the construction of the Kavanagasau Road along the Sigatoka East Bank.

Major ongoing projects that are timed for completion in the 2022-2023 financial year will require funding for completion include; the Vuci Road Upgrading Project (\$3 million) and the upgrade of the Queen Elizabeth Drive, Nasese (\$20 million). To explore more feasible options for easing congestion on our roads, \$150,000 is allocated for planning, investigation and a survey for Adi Lady Davila Road and the Nadi to Lautoka four lane road. Investment along these frequently traffic routes will foster growth and development in nearby areas and make the road safer and more reliable for road users.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$145,000 will enable FRA to commence a pre-feasibility investigation into the construction of the Viti Levu cross-country highway - a road that will become one-off, if not, the most ambitious infrastructure projects in the history of the South Pacific. From a strategic nation-building perspective, such a highway will significantly reduce travel times, for one. It will also unlock serious

opportunities for our interior communities, who have been constrained by the setup of our national infrastructure network. The highway will be built section by section, creating jobs along the way, and once completed, Sir, it would be Fiji's first-ever toll road, bridging the West to our capital, creating for far greater social mobility and huge opportunity for commercial, industrial and tourism expansion throughout Viti Levu's interior. It will catapult the value of land in the interior. More land will be leased, more Fijians will have access to affordable homes in areas that are made more convenient, and that will create benefits for our *iTaukei* landowners.

There are a number of non-FRA assets - roads, crossings and culverts around the country that were initiated as projects through communities and Government Ministries and, therefore, not classified as FRA assets. Whether you call a road an FRA asset or not, it does not change its value to a community. So an increased allocation of \$5.5 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will allow the FRA to upgrade these assets so the students can get to school, vendors and farmers can get to markets, those in need of medical assistance can get to hospitals and people can generally get whatever they are going to. This, of course, will mean that eventually these roads will have to be transferred to the FRA as their assets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned earlier that we travelled to Tawake Village for budget consultations. It was actually quite recently that this Government cut the sole road that led to Tawake Village. Many communities in Fiji are still unconnected, Sir. They have no road access and rely entirely on waterways for travel. With the rising cost of fuel, it is exorbitantly expensive to even bring your fish from Udu Point to anywhere to a road access. We have been steadily connecting these communities over the years, though if past Governments had shown the same initiative and had cut just 50 extra kilometres of road every year, all of those communities could have been connected to the nation much more sooner. It is actually a tragedy when you go down and see it on the ground, and here we have people talking about cutting expenditure from FRA. It is our commitment alone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that will allow all those isolated villages we have heard directly from, to be connected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$204.3 million is allocated to the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) - \$89.2 million is allocated for operating expenditure, while \$115.1 million is allocated for capital investment to improve and expand the nation's water distribution network and wastewater management systems. These networks need to become more reliable, more resilient and more capable of serving a nation on the move. If we do not make these investments now, our children will actually pay for our folly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, WAF provides services to some 772,000 Fijians nationwide and currently has 154,383 water and 33,190 wastewater active connections. Most of the ageing infrastructure that makes up the reticulated system was built around or before our independence. Its limit present us with major challenges in both, capacity and maintenance.

Rural-urban drift adds another strain. Currently, there are over 360,000 Fijians residing in the Lami-Nausori corridor. The current peak day demand in the Lami-Nausori area alone is approximately 174 million litres of water a day. But our current WAF systems at full capacity are able to produce only 172 million litres of water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Rewa River Water Supply Scheme Project which supports the water supply and as a result, the sustainable growth and development in the greater Suva area will now be completed in May 2023 - only nine months from now. This project, Sir, together represents an investment of \$270 million - the largest water-related investment in Fijian history. It will end water woes in the Lami-Nausori corridor through an additional 40 million litres worth of water per day for the benefit of over 360,000 Fijians. Sir, that amount exceeds current demand by 38 million litres daily. Of course, it means we can connect to other unconnected areas.

Major service disruptions are also being experienced almost daily along the Tacirua East Subdivision Feed Zone. Due to a land dispute, we could not fully access or utilise the reservoir in the Tacirua East Subdivision. We have developed an alternative route to the reservoir at a great cost, I might add, Mr. Speaker, Sir. However, we can soon supply water to the lower Tacirua East Subdivision area. The WAF has been allocated \$1.1 billion for the urgent completion of the pipe laying connection works and pipe connection works with Tacirua East reservoir. Once the reservoir is commissioned, it will address the service disruptions and bring much needed relief to Tovata, Khalsa, Nagatugata Feed Zones within the next two to three months.

The treated water supply from the WAF infrastructure and Nadi system currently ends at the Uciwai Junction along the Queens Road and the Nabila Village past the Uciwai Settlement. It is the only reticulating water supply infrastructure serving the area which is owned by the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF). As part of this Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are happy to announce that the Government has acquired the Momi Water Pipeline from the FNPF at a cost of around \$2 million, we bought this yesterday. The ink is still wet on the agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we bought it yesterday which was signed between WAF and FNPF. We will begin connecting a total of 3,999 people along the Uciwai to Nawai corridor and settlements, along the coastline from Uciwai to Korokula to the system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total funding of \$18.25 million will fund the extension of water supply to Uciwai, Nalovo, Nawai, the gap between Nabila and Momi Village and school, Nawai Secondary School, Nalovo Sangam School, Savusavu, Tau, Korokula, Bavu, backpackers and upcoming motels near Marriott, progressively over the next two to three years. Out of this \$18.25 million, Sir, a budget of \$800,000 is allocated under the 2022-2023 financial year to extend that water supply to customers at Nalovo Settlement and people residing along the Queens Road from Uciwai to Nawai Junction.

Some of the improvement works under this funding shall include the implementation of the Nawaicoba Booster Pumps, the reservoirs and its associated water mains, construction of water mains for the extension of water supply to areas mentioned, and further construction of reservoirs with booster pumps at Bavu and Tau, to ensure 24 hours water storage and adequate pressures to cater 24/7 supply to 3,999 people – primary and secondary schools and the upcoming hotels and resort development, as mentioned earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the next five years, WAF will be focussing on reducing the amount of water that is lost in the system by strengthening pressure management and leak detection activities. Shockingly, little work was done by previous Governments to regularly maintain water infrastructure, and that short-sightedness is catching up to us. The Authority will also streamline its activities by outsourcing the automation of water and wastewater systems. We need more private sector efficiency and effectiveness to get the job done. It will help us manage assets better and urgently put private sector ingenuity behind our effort to build a climate resilient water and wastewater utility.

To conserve more of our water supply, we have allocated \$1 million for the Rain Water Harvesting Programme and \$5.5 million to improving non-revenue collection. For the Rain Water Harvesting Programme, Government will now fund the construction of bases, as well as distribute the water tanks. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we encountered several cases where tanks were ready to be distributed but the bases were not yet built because people could not afford to build the base, so they did not get the water tanks. Government is now taking on both responsibilities in the name of efficiency. Sir, WAF will be engaging contractors to build these bases across the country to lift this burden from the communities' backs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also amending the Water Authority Fiji Act 2007 to ensure that WAF can issue infringement notices for offences. This will address offences, such as tampering of WAF assets, illegal or unauthorised connections to our water and sewage reticulation system and trade waste non-

compliance. With the introduction of infringement notices, WAF will be strengthening enforcement and compliance to curb these breaches to protect its assets, the communities and, indeed, the environment. Sir, WAF will closely work with relevant stakeholders to educate and raise awareness in this area as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, plumbers provide an essential service in our society and quality of their work underpins the safety of our homes and commercial buildings. Having a licence ensures that a plumber in Fiji has been tested for his or her knowledge and skill to carry out their work. The amendments to the Water Authority Fiji Act 2007 will enable WAF in partnership with FNU, to issue plumbers licences. The task of providing the necessary training, facilities and examination for all Fijians who want to apply and get certified in this trade will be done by FNU. The Plumbers Licence will integrate and replace the Waterworks Fitters Licence and Drain Layers Licence, previously issued by the Water and Sewerage Department and the Municipal Councils respectively in the past.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will continue its efforts of improving our water treatment plants and development of water sources. Government will provide an allocation of \$6.9 million for water treatment plants in Waila, Tamavua, Wainibuku, Balevuto, Benau and Naviqiqi; Tasman water tanks for Nadi Hospital, Lautoka Hospitals and Tauvegavega, Tavakubu and Nawaicoba and water source at Vakadredrebu.

As part of the Water Distribution Programme, \$12 million is allocated for the replacement of old, undersized and leaky water mains and distribution systems. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$4.9 million is also allocated for the Rural Water Supply Programme in order to provide access to clean water in rural communities - Villages in Navutu, Nauluvatu and Waibalavu in Naitasiri, Dada Government Station, Ratu Simione School in Namosi, Balekinaga Village, Driti Village in Tailevu, Nagatagata Village and Marou Village in Ba, Navola Village, Sariyawa in Nadroga, Vatukacevaceva and Nawairuku Village, Bureiwai District School, Rarapatu Settlement in Ra, Domonisavu District School in Cakaudrove, Tavulomo Village in Bua, Bucalevu Combined Scheme and Nakanacagi Village in Macuata.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department of Energy has been allocated \$4 million to install standalone solar home systems in 1,000 homes in remote communities that do not have access to the main EFL grid. This is more affordable, it makes these communities more resilient by lessening their fossil fuel dependence and helps us be in line with the low emissions target we have set for ourselves and which we demand from the world. All 1,000 households will be receiving a Type 2 system, which has a capability of supplying AC loads such as charging laptops, mobile phones, torches, televisions, small radios, fans, small washing machines and any other small loads less than 300 watts.

The Department of Energy has also been allocated another \$1million for the maintenance of the Type 2 systems, a responsibility that covers around 5,000 systems for the 2022-2023 financial year. Also there are approximately 1,500 systems on the ground that are Type 1. It will cost around \$6 million to replace the systems to Type 2 and will be done progressively over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will also be assisting the Lautoka City Council with the upgrade and installation of the stadium lighting at Churchill Park. We want the Fijian Drua home games to be also played in the evenings and we need to light up the stadium to make that happen to meet international standards. Night games get more fans and we saw that right here in Suva at the ANZ Stadium, which I understand now has changed its name to another company that sponsored it - HFC. They also bring in more viewers around the world. Sir, \$0.5 million will go towards this project to light up Lautoka and, of course, we want the Drua to do really well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$3.4 million is allocated for the shipping services subsidy in the financial year, which will cater for the increase in subsidy rates to the routes around the Scheme. The increase in subsidy rates will cushion the impact of rising fuel costs and ensure business continuity for vessel operators that

service the uneconomical routes in the Franchise Scheme. Additionally, \$100,000 will be allocated to cater for the upgrading and managing of facilities in Vatuyalewa Jetty in Buca Bay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$2.5 million is allocated for the construction of the retaining wall along the Government Shipping Wharf side of the water course. The project will be undertaken in two phases: Phase 1 will be implemented in 2022-2023 financial year in which 107 metres of retaining wall will be constructed to prevent soil erosion, which can cause severe damage to Government Shipping vessels and the premises.

The Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project is pushing ahead, despite some delays. Nadi's climate resilience is vital to its residents and the tens of thousands of Fijians working in tourism who rely on the Jetset Town as our international hub and, indeed, a gateway to our country. Physical works will begin on the drainage system in Nadi Town proper and design works for the widening of the Nadi River to reduce flood risks that have been devastating communities along the river on a yearly basis. The project has been delayed due to COVID-19, but all efforts are now put in place to expedite the works. This has to get done and, indeed, it will.

We were there only few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we saw the devastation. We had one particular village where people used to plant cane and that 200 metres of cane farm has actually gone and now become part of the river. We are funding that effort through a renewed mix of funding commitments from the Japanese and Australian Governments, along with the \$5 million in Government funding. Discussions will also be held with the World Bank to gauge the interest in the project funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no form of infrastructure is more determinative for success in the 21st Century than digital infrastructure. It is the area where Government's agenda is the least anchored by past incompetence, because the nation's digital revolution has happened almost entirely under this Government's watch. Fiji's data speeds are superb, data is accessible virtually nationwide, the most remote, rural and maritime pockets of the country are increasingly being reached by satellite network.

Under our flagship initiative – digitalFIJI and over the past four years we have launched the full Government digital directory which enabled Fijians to e-communicate feedback directly to the Government and track the status of their feedback while they await a response, undertook comprehensive assessments, streamline the process of a number of agencies, massively expedited the digital registration of a newborn; provide a suite of full online ROC services such as companies and businesses, systems, name searches, lodgements, amendments, deregistration and cessation services and ability to make online payments.

The Ministry's total budget for 2022-2023 financial year is \$53.8 million. The Ministry will continue to provide and enhance those services and deploy more innovation. The Ministry will continue to provide and enhance those services and deploy more innovation. The Ministry will continue to provide internet connectivity to unconnected Fijians through the connectivity rollout programmes.

Last November, we connected 26 schools and 14 health centres in the Northern Division. Of these 40 sites, 20 have Wi-Fi hotspots that provide connectivity for the 17,000 Fijians in the surrounding community. We had further identified 59 unconnected and poorly-connected schools nationwide, of which in the last two months, we have connected nine schools already - Navonu Primary School, Eliki Primary School, Nairukuruku District School, Rewa District School, Saqani High School, Ratu Varani Memorial School, Gau Secondary School, Cautata District School and Mua-i-Ra Methodist College. Due to transport challenges, the tenth school – Cicia High School in Lau, will be connected by the end of this month. A sum of \$2.5 million is allocated to connect an additional 49 schools around Fiji and the remaining 35 schools will be connected in the 2023-2024 financial year.

In consultation with the telecommunications sector, an assessment has identified 240 unconnected and poorly connected sites and these sites have been gazetted as universal service areas for mobile phone connectivity which will be implemented in phases. As such, 15 tower sites have been identified under the universal service areas project to connect, at least, 96 unconnected or poorly connected areas to voice and internet connectivity. The tender was advertised earlier this week and while this is being finalised, we anticipate an estimated cost of \$11 million for the construction of these towers. This will be funded from the universal service fund. We will also use the Telecommunications Development Trust Fund to fund some of the operations and maintenance of the towers that are to be built.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$1 million is allocated to the Ministry to conduct a feasibility study and develop implementation plans to build a submarine cable landing station in the western side of Viti Levu. The Vatuwaqa cable landing station provides over 80 percent of international connectivity for Fiji. If it ever fails, God forbid, we will lose connectivity to most of the country. It happened in Tonga recently; it could just as well happen here. Building a submarine landing station in the Western Division which will connect to a different existing international submarine fibre optic cable, will increase resilience and stability to our telecommunications network and will strengthen our position as the ICT hub of the Pacific. Indeed, many BPOs will only come to Fiji if they know that we have a redundancy line. In this financial year, we will engage a consultant to undertake a feasibility study, conduct environmental and social impact assessment, develop implementation plans and engage a project management consultant to oversee this important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have successfully completed the digital switchover awareness project for the whole of Viti Levu and another \$14.6 million will be allocated to *Walesi* this year to fund the completion of digital switchover awareness project for the rest of Fiji. The continuation of free wireless internet hotspot access across 16 public areas throughout all towns and cities, as well as cover operational expenses to support universal access to information through digital television and radio. Today, we have over 200,000 households with *Walesi* set-top boxes throughout Fiji which have connected through *Walesi's* 25 transmission sites across Fiji and over 700,000 subscribers to the *Walesi* app; 700,000 people watch *Walesi* on their phones now. In times of disaster, celebration and any time the nation needs notification, you will be connected on the same national network of news, no matter where in Fiji you reside.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Walesi* also provides free installations for villages and community halls to enable access to information for disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Places that have never had access to live news, live sports and other entertainment and, indeed, access to parliamentary proceedings, now have it and through the allocation in this Budget, *Walesi* will install an additional 50 community installations - 50 more communities will be part of our national-connected network.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given that COVID-19 is not entirely eradicated and to future-proof our recovery efforts to produce trusted, secure and credible proof of vaccination and test certificates, the Ministry of Communications laid the groundwork for a vaccine registry and subsequently, a Fijian Vaccine Pass. The Fijian Vaccine Pass is International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and EU General Data Protection Regulation compliant. The system has the capability to and with further enhancements, be repurposed for future pandemics and also provide the foundational components for the future single identification efforts that we have for the national ID card.

As previously announced, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Valelevu Shuttle Bus Pilot Programme will serve the greater Nasinu area - the most densely populated area of the country, including the area between Centre Point and Davuilevu in Nakasi. The shuttle service will cater for around 13 routes by the end of this calendar year at a cost of around \$4 million. We will have electric shuttle buses running on these routes representing the first electric public transportation fleet in Fiji. Aside from making travel

cleaner and more convenient, they represent an ambitious and important step towards decarbonising our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we cannot reach everywhere in Fiji by road, as mentioned earlier on. In this Budget, we have allocated \$500,000 to subsidise the purchase of fully equipped and operational fibreglass boats for Fijians living in the most isolated coastal areas of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The initiative known as a Seafaring Entrepreneur Assistance or SEA subsidy, furthers our longstanding commitment to the self-starting culture of business in our maritime community.

To date, \$108,053 has been approved for release and disbursement to 16 applicants. This half-a-million dollar allocation will fund many more. Given the large number of requests during the Budget consultation meetings, the subsidy will now be extended to those living in deep rural areas where there is no road access. These include; *Tikina* of Tawake – Tawake, Nagasauva, Vatu, Wainigadru, Wainika and Yasawa; Tikina Udu - Cikobia, Yacata, Galoa, Kavewa, Yaqaqa, Druadrua, Navaidredre, Qamea, Nukuni in Rewa and Bau Island. This will, of course, be extended to these areas too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's airports are our bridge to the world and the foundation of our tourism industry's recovery. We have been searching exhaustively for management entity to implement a customer centric and capital intensive vision to expand the reach of our airports and improve the quality of service offered to travellers. Naming an outside manager for Fiji Airports is not at all uncommon. Changi Airport in Singapore may be the best in the world, its operation and management are also handled by an outsider operator. Qatar Airways Group also manage the Hamad International Airport (HIA). We did not have to look far to find world leading aviation management expertise. Despite going up against larger and better resource competitors, our national carrier - Fiji Airways, flies in the vast majority of all visitors to Fiji.

In the next early months of our recovery, they flew in nearly all of our visitors. There is a reason people choose to fly like a Fijian, Fiji Airways provides incomparable service while competing vigorously to maintain comparable fares. The point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the Fiji Airways model of service delivery has not only been honed against the best of the best, it has wider application across our aviation sector where their management team has deep industry knowledge. After considerable deliberation, Sir, we have identified Fiji Airways as a national partner to manage Fiji Airport's operations.

We have since finalised a management agreement to leverage Fiji Airways' culture of world class customer service and strategic investment for the benefit of every airport in the country. This administrative change will not affect their business, mission, Board of Directors, governance structure, compliance or staff of Fiji Airports. It is still a business that prioritises shareholder value and connecting Fiji to itself and to the world. Fiji Airways will simply become responsible for the day to day operations, with the relentless focus on the customers which in this case, everyone who uses Fijian airports, our citizens and visitors alike, from baggage handling to gate management, retail experience and every other service known by the public, unseen by the public also in the industry as below the wing.

We have successfully employed an outside operator before at Fiji Ports Terminal Limited where cargo handling has improved by 60 percent, average turnaround time for vessels increased from 36 hours to 20 hours and average berthing time per vessel reduced from six hours to one hour or less.

Fiji Airways management mandate will be to step up airport infrastructure nationwide, meaning to upgrade our existing airports and build new ones. Starting in Nadi, they will upgrade the

baggage handling and air site infrastructure and enhance the arrival experience, improve customer amenities at Nausori Airport and review our outer island facilities, including Labasa and Savusavu with an eye for major capital development opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, housing is a form of infrastructure that belongs with the people as an asset they can grow in value and pass on to their children, but ensuring access to adequate housing is about more than any financial benefit. It is about security, it is in fact about dignity, ownership and optimism for families. Through its Informal Settlement Upgrade and Formalisation Programme, the Ministry of Housing and Community Development acquires iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTTLTB) development leases and State leases where it is necessary, predominately iTTLTB leases, and then adds the infrastructure necessary to formalise settlements and make them worthy places to call home; they get a 99-year lease.

To date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has acquired a total of 42 development leases to safeguard low income families and also ensure that landowning units are adequately compensated with premium and annual rental payments that are funded directly by Government.

Annually, the Ministry of Housing pays close to \$300,000 in rental payments for these 42 development leases. The 2022–2023 Budget, funding has been allocated to acquire two more development leases; Valemasima and Sakoca Stage 2. After acquisition, these leases will be placed into the informal settlement upgrade work plan. Of the 42 existing development leases, 12 are currently in the tender stage for the engagement of a contractor and six are currently in the engineering phase.

The Ministry of Housing and Community Development has been provided an allocation of \$9.8 million to run the informal settlement upgrade and formalisation programme in the 2022–2023 financial year. Through the revised 2021–2022 Budget, we, as the Government stood up for the injustice faced by Fijians seeking affordable housing at Lagilagi or Jittu Estate as commonly known. We have discussed this scam in detail in previous budgets so there is no need to review the details again now.

What is important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to know for budget purposes is that the magnitude of the fraud became clearer once the reimbursement application process began. The Ministry received more than 655 applications, at least 318 more than we initially expected and has already paid out a little over \$2.2 million to date to over 336 applicants. We are now allocating \$1.9 million for the 2022-2023 financial year to reimburse the remaining 318 victims of the scam.

We, as the Government of the day see it as our responsibility to return the funds to our wronged citizens and finally heal the wounds left by People's Community Network (PCN). The revised Social Housing Assistance Policy aims to introduce more sustainable and climate resilient housing assistance to those who need it the most. The recipients must be members of the land owning unit if they are building their home within the community boundaries or they hold a freehold or a lease title for the land they want to build on.

Through the 2022–2023 Budget, the Ministry has provided an allocation of \$1 million to implement the revised Social Housing Policy with successful applicants eligible for a maximum grant of \$10,000 for the purchase and transportation of building materials. I say transportation because many of these communities are in the maritime areas.

The Koroipita Model Towns Charitable Trust is a non-governmental organisation committed to building engineered and service subdivisions and cyclone safe houses for low income Fijian households. The Ministry of Housing and Community Developments is allocated \$2.1million to

provide shelter to 105 more families in desperate need of safe accommodation under Koroipita Stage 4.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also taking steps to house more civil servants through opportunities for private investors to construct and operate strata title housing quarters that are available exclusively to civil servants and their families. We will be starting by making the first crop of units available to the Fiji Police Force. Over the long term, this will ensure that civil servants can affordably own homes and alleviate pressure on the wider housing community and market, extending the same benefit for all home buyers and builders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and finally on the subject of infrastructure, I wish to quickly review the current projects under tender and advertisement. We provided funding in the next financial year to break ground on a new Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services Warehouse, the subdivision construction works for Sasawira Informal Settlement, the design and build for the existing dormitory at Ratu Kadavulevu School, the upgrading of the Savusavu Market, the rehabilitation and construction of schools in Kadavu and Southern Lau and the design and build of the Nabouwalu Passenger Terminal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to now turn to one of the most important pillars of a sustained recovery and which is of course not built on bricks and mortar, it is built by knowledge gained through education. The pandemic changed the global labour market in defining enduring ways. Despite moving on to recovery, many advanced economies still suffer debilitating workplace shortages in health care, hospitality, education and other service sectors in air transport and other industries.

To fill these gaps, many developed countries are poaching skilled workers from developing countries like Fiji. There was a recent advertisement in our newspapers offering to pay Fijian chefs with three years or more experience up to AUD80,000 to AUD120,000 annually to work in Australia because there is a shortage of chefs in Australia. There is no wonder why our citizens are in demand, we have incredible people and this Budget also makes our biggest ever commitment to their education.

The same generation features empowered by free education have benefitted from \$1.2 billion in Government support towards tertiary scholarships and study loans. In the next financial year, that commitment will be strengthened by a \$162.6 million allocation to fund scholarships, study loans and grants. We will award more scholarships, more student loans and more grants in the next financial year than any other year in Fijian history, funding a total of 9,200 scholarships and student loans in addition to 2,000 grants for what we call “micro qualifications” for skills to meet the anticipated boom in our construction sector and combat the overseas poaching of our skilled workers.

Under the current system, students who were pursuing qualifications which require an industry attachment have been at the mercy of the markets with regards to what they are paid. Because these attachments are required, there are very little leverage to negotiate competitive allowance. Pursuing an education should not mean accepting the bare minimum of living standards and we do not want to push that cost of higher allowances onto the employers. Government is currently paying \$100 a month in allowance to students completing industrial attachments under TSLS sponsorship.

In this Budget, we go further to also provide that \$100 a month top-up to private students for the first time. If I am a private student, for example, studying mechanics or pastry chef and I have to get an attachment then we will give you the \$100. This grant assistance requirements will be able to meet their graduation requirement in the student’s programme of choice, with no extra strings attached. Many of these people cannot complete it because they cannot get a work placement.

To boost employment in our construction sector, Sir, we will also provide 200 awards as a one-off grant for up to \$500 per student for those who do not meet the eligibility for scholarships and study loans. These students are looking to enter the job market with skills that can earn them a decent living instead of facing unemployment. This grant funding will help them obtain what we call “micro qualifications” in a construction related skilled course over a period of two weeks or to one month. Once that education is completed, they can go on to become tile layers, painters, cabinet makers, joiners, block layers, plumbers and other professions that are critical to the national network of modern infrastructure we are building every day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an aside, when the Christchurch earthquake took place in the huge rebuild, many of our bricklayers, plumbers, tilers and plaster men and women went away because they took them on short-term visas and they have been now granted long-term visas. So, we were left with this gap.

Not to mention, Mr. Speaker, these students can go on to study diplomas and certificates in more advanced areas once they acquire enough practical knowledge. This grant will be targeted but not limited to those who do not meet eligibly criteria for scholarships and student loans. But to be clear, Sir, this is not a loan and there are no strings attached because we really need to fill in this gap because we are seeing now, many in the construction sector are hiring workers from Bangladesh, they bring them from Philippines. We want our people to get the first opportunity if they have the skill sets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us also be clear in saying that TVET is not a second class education and the professionals produced through its study programmes are no less critical to the building of the nation than any other. We need mechanics, we need plumbers, electricians, welders, joiners as much as we need any profession in Fiji. These are important skills and they should be branded an equally respected as such.

Through this Budget we will rebrand TVET to what we call “Skills Qualification” in recognition of the value these skills offer our economy. To ensure that equal respect is given, the Government will introduce a new scholarship scheme known as “Skills Qualification” at FNU with 200 awards. The cut-off mark for this new scholarship scheme will be 250 in Year 13 or 270 in Year 12. The Government will also reinstate the National Toppers Overseas Scheme which was suspended because it was entirely impractical to send students overseas due to pandemic related travel restrictions.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can now make up for lost time. The previous allocation to these scholarships will double next year to 40; 30 of those will be for Degree Programmes in Engineering, Medicines, Science, Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, IT, Architecture, et cetera which is not available in Fiji; five will be for working people in public sector organisations and five for the newly branded skills qualifications.

For the first time for studies in Fiji, we will allocate 10 PhD Research Scholarships and 20 Masters Research Scholarships for full time studies. Three awards for the Masters Scholarships will be ring-fenced for the newly formed Monash University-FNU Pacific Island Countries (PICs) Climate Change Research Centre (CCRC). The areas of study will be Medicine, Health, Science, Engineering, Climate Change and Environmental Science as mentioned, Marine Science, Forestry, Public Policy, Public Financing, Economic Modelling and ICT.

All recipients of these PhD and Masters Awards will have compulsory bonding with employers who are classified as Fijian entities. These post graduate level opportunities for our best and brightest are born for a push for innovation, our focus on research that can solve our greatest

challenges and the creation of new knowledge that strengthens the foundation of our talented workforce and knowledge-based society and indeed our young people. We do not always need the world to solve our challenges for us, we will find home-grown leading experts that can solve our challenges alongside the world.

The Government will increase the National Toppers Local Scheme Award from 547 to 770 with 40 awards to MBBS, five for Bachelor of Dental Surgery and 40 for Nursing. The scholarship cut-off mark for the nursing programme will be 300 in Year 13. We are making landmark investments and launching innovated policies to expand the rich and quality of health care in Fiji including surgeries that have not been offered in Fiji before. We need more doctors, more nurses and more dentists amongst other specialists to deliver on our commitment to a healthier Fiji.

Many of our teachers Mr. Speaker, Sir, are being poached by overseas educational systems as well. Recently, about 60 teachers were acquired by Australia. The Government will allocate 165 scholarships for teacher training in Maths and Physics, Industrial Arts, Primary Education and Computer Science. The scholarship scheme for students with special needs will continue. Awards for the in-service scheme will increase from 120 to 140 awards, of which 100 will be for public sector organisations and 40 also for the private sector and state-owned enterprises. For anyone at home doing the maths, this announcement mean that the total number of scholarships for the next financial year has doubled to 1,200. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know students are keen to know how they can apply. The full eligibility criteria will be published by TSLs and the Fijian scholarship scheme regulations and online.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijian students lost out on significant hours of learning in 2021 which was the toughest year for Year 12 students who are now in Year 13 and preparing to go into tertiary education. Therefore the cut-off mark for TELS for degree level programmes will remain at 250 except for Commerce discipline where it will be 280 excluding Accounting, Economics and Management or Administration where the cut-off mark will be 300.

For TELS, the skills qualification to FNU, the eligibility will be a pass in Year 12, Certificate I or II from the Fiji Higher Education Commission recognised institutions or an offer letter obtained from FNU. The Government will allocate 2,800 TELS for degree level programmes. Nursing will have 200 allocations and there will be an increased allocation for teacher training, ICT, Environmental and Marine Science disciplines.

Skills qualification from Levels III, IV and V at FNU will have 4,600 allocations. The existing employees scheme will be expanded and rebranded as existing employee entrepreneur scheme with 100 allocations fund both employees and entrepreneurs to obtain a qualification to the level of certificate, diploma and degree. Should an entrepreneur running his or her own business can pursue an accounting certificate or business management certificate, for example, that is vital to his or her business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government will also introduce two new schemes under TELS. The first is the qualification upgrade that allows those who were have never been funded by TSLs as well as those who have repaid their loans in full to the bachelor level to upgrade to the post graduate diploma level. In addition, those holding a certificate or a diploma who have been funded by TSLs will be allowed to complete up to a degree programme to gain competitive edge for employment if they are not currently working. Sir, 400 of these student loans will be available in the next financial year.

The second is skills qualification for other tertiary education providers, including FNU and others. Mr. Speaker, Sir, for example, we have already stressed how important these careers are to

the Fijian economy. In some cases, we face such a serious dearth in professions like tile laying where we have had to import skilled labourers as mentioned earlier on. These are jobs that our people should be qualified to do and paid to do. This scheme will fund skills qualification and this is what we call “blue collar jobs” such as fitting and machining, automotive body works, carpentry, fabrication and welding, joinery and cabinet making, plumbing and sheet metal, refrigeration and air-conditioning, automotive electrical and on electronics, construction and tile laying as well. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 100 of these student loans will be available in the next financial year. The eligibility will be a pass in Year 12, Certificate I or Certificate II from Fiji Higher Education Commission recognised institution or an offer letter from preferred eligible institution.

Tertiary education providers, Nadave Centre for Appropriate Technology (CATD) and Montfort Boys Town were not eligible for the TSLs funding and sponsorship can now apply and be included under this scheme provided they meet all of the TSLs criteria. In total, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that makes another 8,000 Students’ loans. This criteria will also be published by the TSLs, the TELS Regulation and available online.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we currently have \$581 billion in outstanding of TELS debts. The FRCS and TELS have recently signed an MOU to ensure that loans are paid as fairly as possible and with the full co-operation of employers. We will be acquiring specific provision employed in New Zealand that obligates an employer to notify TSLs on Government funded students recruit for employment. We had announced previously an accelerated payment schedule for TELS recipients that would allow them to access huge discounts or up to 50 percent in their repayments. After some discussion with the banks, we are pleased to announce that we can go further. As the banks, we had a meeting with them in fact yesterday, are willing to come forward to refinance loans for students so that they can take advantage of these discounts. Additionally, a 100 percent tax deduction will be available to companies on the amount of tuition, living expenses paid for students at a higher education institution specified in the Higher Education Act 2008.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a responsible practical strategy that ensures the long-term sustainability in Fiji’s education revolution. We are a young country, let us not forget, 70 percent of Fijians are under the age of 40, 65 percent are under the age of 35, this young generation Fijians will have families and they will have children, it will cripple the nation financially to offer scholarships for all as we prepared to put this historic numbers of young people through high education. It is not sustainable. Since its introduction, TELS had empowered over 50,000 students to access higher education, otherwise they have not been able to afford. We can empower 100 or 1,000 more through the years ahead provided we keep on the path of sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are conducting a review to ensure the smaller schools and more isolated areas are getting equitable funding’s through the free education grant. We will also grant more flexibility for schools with the grants we pay them so that they can now use the free education grant to also make lease rental payments to whoever they lease the land from and cover insurance costs to school buildings, including fire and cyclone insurance.

The Ministry of Education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, engages more than 500 rural services transport providers who drive more than 34,000 students to school on a daily basis. These are small, what we call minibus operators RSL operators, many of whom regularly go beyond the call of duty to transport students in rural areas to their classrooms, a lot of them live in their own villages to transport students. The rise in fuel price that has hit these folks is really hard therefore, in this budget, we are increasing the current RSL voucher by 36.3 percent. This increase is in line with the increase for bus fare and will help rural transport providers to stay in operation and cover their costs. It is about our children going to school, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All of whom everywhere in the country and we thank these operators for the great length they go literally to make sure our education revolution reaches every corner of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sport and education go hand in hand, both require investment in people to reach their full potential and this budget delivers on both fronts. The 2022-2023 Financial Year, the Government is allocating a total of \$6.9 million for sports grants that will support the development of sport activities in our communities, \$1.9 million has been allocated to assist and enhance the performance of Fiji's National Team through participation at regional and international tournaments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, funding in the new financial year has been prioritised for the following sporting activities Athletics, Rugby Union, Netball, Basketball, Cricket, Hockey and Weightlifting. Sir, \$79,500 has been allocated to support overseas training for elite athletes and technical officials. Funding with the new financial year has been prioritised for the following sporting activities, Rugby League, Swimming, Tennis and Yachting. Regional and international tournaments are huge source of economic activity for Fiji, investments bring these events to Fiji to pay back massive returns. \$2 million has been allocated to support the hosting of international tournaments in the new financial year.

The National Sports Commission aims to host the following national sporting events, Australian Football League Fiji, Athletics, Basketball, Cycling, Football Association, Netball, Rugby League, Rugby Union, Squashed, Tennis and Yachting. Sir, \$1.6 million allocation will ensure that the promising elite athletes are exposed to intense high level of training required to participate, renounce competition in order to better improve the country ranking at world events. The funding will directly support the engagement of support coaches in Footballs, Netball, Rugby League, Rugby Union and Yachting.

A \$500,000 in funding will assist the Fiji National Sports Commission to develop a sports programme in rural communities to hold basic skills in the range of sports and identify clear career paths for young people. The funding will cater for the following sports:

1. Sports Community Camp programmes;
2. Train the Trainer Programmes;
3. Educate the Educator Programme;
4. Children in Community Inclusive Sports Programme; and
5. Wellness Sports Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$200,000 has been provided for the engagement of the local and international experts to assist in sports development in the country. The programme aims to support the training and development of the local athletes and sports administrators to international standards in several sports for men and women. The Government continues to ensure inclusivity and equality by supporting sports. Physical activities and development for people with disabilities and special needs, the funding provision of \$60,000 in the new financial year will cater for the Paralympics in special schools.

The 2022-2023 financial year funding of \$654,466 has been allocated to support the growth of minor sporting activities including volleyball, netball, badminton and futsal. The funding has been allocated to support the construction of the two hardcourts in Kamikamica Park in Lautoka and Tataiwa in Rakiraki and the construction of Multipurpose Courts in Tuatua Housing in Labasa and in Vunidawa, Naitasiri.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a young population, as I have mentioned, 65 percent are below the age of 35 years, and 70 percent are below 40 years, and these young people will have children and sustainability, of course, is a key also in the sporting area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pandemic forced us to innovate and implement the Free General Practitioner Scheme or the Free GP Scheme, as it has become known, to allow Fijians who used to rely on the public health system to seek consultations and treatments at private GP clinics at Government's cost. We did that out of necessity and we have kept the programme because it works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$1 million is allocated for the Free GP Scheme for the 2022-2023 Budget. An additional 23 GPs have been selected to provide free medical services to the general public. With the inclusion of the additional 23 GPs, there will now be 38 private GPs in a total of 40 outlets throughout the nation, providing medical service to ordinary Fijians with all cost borne by the Government. The GPs have now also been selected in Korovou, Nausori, Nakasi, Nadera, Suva, Navua, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Labasa and Savusavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to remind everyone, as previously announced, the Government funded medical services on offer at these clinics include consultations, reviews, referrals, injections, dressing, including minor dressings. We have now added six new services to that on 20th June to the Free GP Scheme: multi urine dip stick, Electro Cardiogram (ECG), nebuliser, oxygen supply, ultra sound scan and the sugar prick test. Approved laboratory testing service under the Scheme will also provide testing for sugar levels, complete blood count, basic metabolic panel, cholesterol level, glycated haemoglobin, liver function, renal function or kidney function.

As announced previously, to expand these various initiatives, another \$200,000 is allocated to incentivise private GPs to establish new clinics in densely populated, what we call in peri-urban and rural areas including Nawaicoba, Malolo, Naidovi, Drasa, Sabeto, Seaqaqa, Dreketi, Nasarawaqa, Korolevu and Pacific Harbour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the revised 2021-2022 Budget, it was also announced that Government will engage private Dental Practitioners, to improve the oral health of all Fijians including school aged children through Government funded access to private dental care. There are currently four Dental Practitioners under the Scheme who provide consultation, oral examination, extraction, temporary filling and permanent filling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$500,000 is allocated for the private Dental Practitioner's Scheme in 2022-2023 Budget. This partnership is to ease the burden on the public medical facilities and grants patients who used to depend fully on the public health system access to high quality health care more quickly without waiting in long queues. This initiative is also an opportunity for dentists to grow their patient base and support the public health system in providing the necessary medical care to all Fijians.

The Fijian Government in consultation with Fiji Care is finalising the launching of a dedicated website for the initiative together with the Online Patient Information System, which is expected to streamline necessary processes for the administration of the initiative. Through this online platform, GPs in the Scheme will have access to all these patients seen under the PPT Scheme. Necessary amendments to the Acts and Regulation will be put in place for this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also broaden the availability of medical and dental services by allowing Medical and Dental Practitioners engaged in PPT Scheme to prescribe, supply and dispense essential medicines for 24 hour period, as approved by the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. This means it grants flexibility to patients. If I go and see a doctor at night and I need medicine urgently and the pharmacy nearby may be closed or far away, the doctor can actually give me medicine enough to last me until I can go to a chemist when it opens the next day. This is not going to upend the pharmaceutical sector but in fact provide essential services. Prescriptions in the clinical level will only be permitted, if the nearest pharmacy is closed, otherwise these operators will be fined. The medicines that the medical practitioners will supply and dispense include amoxicillin capsules, flucloxacillin capsules, ibuprofen, paracetamol and oral rehydration salt and the medicines that the dental practitioner in the PPT Scheme will be able to supply and dispense include ibuprofen tablets and paracetamol.

We will also continue to engage private medical laboratories for laboratory analysis and blood samples referred by GPs engaged under the Free GP Scheme. There are seven laboratories currently engaged under the Scheme and \$500,000 is allocated for the Private Medical Laboratory Scheme in the 2022-2023 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the engagement of these laboratories will ensure that GPs participating in this Scheme have reliable access to affordable and high-quality laboratories, an essential component in the successful prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illnesses.

In the 2022-2023 Budget, Sir, \$1 million is allocated for the outsourcing of biomedical facilities like x-ray machines, MRI scan machines, ultrasound machines, CT scanners including public health system laboratories and to be maintained and operated 24/7 by the private sector in public hospitals. The reason is this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, experts in this highly technical sector are highly in demand globally. When a public employee is poached, there is no one often who can be quickly trained to fill the role. Outsourcing this aspect of care makes us more resilient to staffing shortages and also grant us immediate access to the highest level of technicians for even the most sophisticated devices. Overall, this move reduces cost, improves the reliability of services to general public and improves the equipment performance and longevity. We have three major capital projects earmarked for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in 2022-2023 Budget.

The first is Savusavu Hospital which is one of the three subdivisional hospitals in the Northern Division. It offers a wide stream of services but the facility itself has been plagued by severe weather. Heavy rains combined with insufficient drainage have resulted in its rapid deterioration. In this Budget, \$2 million will go towards engaging a contractor to begin the much-needed and frankly, long-awaited refurbishment and land stabilisation works at the Savusavu Hospital. This is great news for residents and for the future of Savusavu's local economy. Major investments in the area are putting our hidden paradise on the map and quality and reliable healthcare is a pillar of Savusavu's sustainable tourism development.

The other two are the construction of the new CWM Hospital Maternity Ward and the upgrade of the Labasa Hospital interior works which had been delayed almost entirely due to the pandemic. It was impractical, if not impossible to manage major renovations while these facilities were the frontline of COVID-19 response. While these projects have been delayed, they will still be delivered.

The next financial year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$5.2 million will go towards these projects. The Ministry will be completing the tender stage and engage a suitable contractor to initiate the planned capital works. It is good news for the north and for expectant mothers and families in our Central Division. We have procured a new brand or a brand new hyperbaric chamber at CWM which is used for emergencies relating to scuba diving, an important assurance for tourists who dive in our waters and a third of the Fijian population who rely on the sea. All allocation of \$120,000 for the final instalment has been budgeted for in 2022-2023, to make the final payment on the chamber.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's farms have never been more productive. That is a fact. Agriculture is not in decline in this country. It is at high records. In 2021 alone, crop production increased from 296,579 to 320,806 MT or metric tonnes, an increase by 8.1 percent. One major driver of that growth is mechanisation. Over the years, the Ministry of Agriculture has been supporting farmers through provision of farm machinery on hired basis and highly subsidised rates. The hired rate for these machines including tractors, excavators and bulldozers and rice harvesters is at \$28 per hour across the board.

This has further mechanisation but the Ministry continues to receive daily complaints from farmers who are still waiting to be provided with farm machinery. To help meet this demand, government will outsource the provision of machinery to farmers through a \$7 million allocation. Tractors, excavators, bull and swamp dozers and harvesters will be hired to farmers on a 50-50 basis. Stepping

up mechanisation and, therefore, agriculture production will allow us to seize market opportunities, especially niche areas like turmeric. We expect this assistance will also support farmers who have engaged in horticultural crops, root crops, turmeric, kava, rice and livestock.

Speaking of livestock, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as announced in the revised 2021-2022 Budget, the Fijian Government will be assisting commercial livestock farmers to raise farm productivity to improve the competitiveness and overall sustainability of the livestock sector. Sir, \$350,000 is allocated to the 2022-2023 financial year for what we call SELF which is targeted support for large scale livestock farmers who have traditionally not received government support. This direct assistance to purchase additional livestock will allow commercial livestock farmers to achieve the scale necessary to better support local demand and export livestock to foreign markets.

In the long-term this will produce high quality meats, eggs and other animal products at lower prices (I should not say eggs but embryos). Under this assistance Mr. Speaker, Sir, livestock farmers can receive a grant up to \$10,000 towards the purchase of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats including the purchase of water tanks and fencing materials.

Antimicrobial resistance is increasing concerning global health and issues affecting people and livestock. Essentially, bacteria becoming more resistant to the tools we have long relied on to fight them. Fiji in this case lacks the access to qualified veterinarians who can treat the resistant trends of bacteria. We are doing amendments or carrying out amendments to the Veterinaries Surgeons Act to allow for the local graduates to be registered as para veterinarians under the Veterinarian Scheme.

In the interim we are making provisions for those who have Bachelor of Veterinaries and is to be registered as para veterinarians and provide service in animal health production. We will be calling on para veterinarians to take a lead role in providing veterinarian services directly to livestock farmers in Fiji. We will establish para veterinarian clinics, privately they can do so where registered para veterinarians will work with farmers to maintain animal welfare, health and hygiene. They will know how much to administer to the animals and they can set up their own business.

In this case, students who have graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinarian Science can undertake a five day para veterinarian course provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and immediately register with the Ministry to establish their clinics. Concurrently, the Ministry will be provided with an intensive six months qualifying course and training to register these graduates as full veterinary officers once they pass a qualifying exam.

The Government will continue to support the agricultural sectors through our various public enterprises. Government has allocated a capital grant of \$323,150 to the Yaqara Pastoral Company Limited (YPCL). The two-third contribution for the purchase of the new excavator that will allow the company to construct observation points in the mountainous area near Yaqara and boundary fences to control the movement of livestock.

Fiji Coconut Millers have been provided \$420,750 to support its replanting programme and farm cleaning rehabilitation. The new Farming Cleaning Initiative, FCML has identified 20 farmers with a combined land area of 50 acres to be assisted at a cost of \$4,500 per acre. It is expected that \$245,000 will be used for this purpose and the remaining funds will be used for coconut replanting.

Fiji Rice Limited has been allocated \$1.3 million in 2022-2023 financial year with the purchase of paddy from farmers. This subsidy ensures that rice farmers will be paid upfront when supplying paddy to the rice mill at Dreketi in Vanualevu.

The Government has again provided \$1.2 million to Food Processors Fiji Limited to undertake critical infrastructure upgrades for the factory, improve its farm in Batiri and subsidise the purchase of agricultural products from farmers.

The Fijian Government commenced the ‘stronger together jobs support scheme’ to incentivise employers to create employment for out of work Fijians. To date \$2.6 million Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been spent to help 85 employers who hired 2,453 Fijians. Employers assisted through this Initiative include pharmacies, manufacturing companies, hotels, construction and security companies.

In 2022-2023 \$2 million have been budgeted to enable the employment of at least 1,500 out of work Fijians. Applications for the Stronger Together Jobs Support Scheme are open to employers in the private sector, public enterprises, registered NGOs and municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will also be amending the Illicit Drugs Control Act 2004 to pave the way for the establishment of the Industrial Hemp Export Industry in Fiji. We have spoken about this in the past and we have taken the time to ensure that we get this right and we have been talking to the UN about this.

Industrial Hemp is a lucrative and largely untapped resource in the global economy due to misconception about what it really is. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Industrial Hemp is not the same thing as marijuana as we call it in Fiji. It contains very low level of THC and would not make anyone high regardless of how much they consume.

However, the trick to getting this right is to ensure that we only import and cultivate Industrial Hemp with the THC level below one percent. There are such amendments due to that effect. We will also amend the Customs Prohibited Import and Export Regulation 1986 to make Industrial Hemp a conditional import item in Schedule 2 for those regulations. Industrial hemp will only be allowed into the country for the purpose of cultivation and export once independent laboratory testing confirms that the THC content is below one percent.

We will be working closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to arrange for the FNU Agriculture School to grow these industrial hemp seeds. Once we have those in hand we will be able to distribute these seeds to farmers whether in Kadavu or anywhere else in Fiji. We plan to source these seeds, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Canada which has very good high quality industrial hemp seeds which are some of the highest quality hemp in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Rewa Dairy has had duty protection for ten years allowing it to grow into the company that it has become. Mr. Speaker Sir, we thank the Southern Cross Foods that actually bought Rewa Dairy in those days, Mr. Speaker, Sir, now called Fiji Dairy large debt stocks. They bought the debt stock out when they bought the company and Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of Rewa Dairy’s supply of milk and our dairy products were being imported then still is because the local demand exceeds far more the supply capacity for the local dairy industry.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course will come to an end on the 31st of August, 2022. The duty of course on these products they will enjoy which will reduce from 32 percent to five percent now on all those products after the expiry of the agreement on cheese, yogurt and liquid and powdered milk. The protections of course benefitted the company that was part of the deal and we thank them for the purchase and we thank them for bringing the industry to where they are today and I would like to, in this respect, actually recognise Sandeep for his momentous and indeed forward-thinking unfortunately he is not with us anymore, Mr. Sandeep Patel. Overall, they should bring about the competition of the supplier of the dairy products and lower prices for ordinary Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like to also finally assure cane growers that sufficient funds have been allocated to the Ministry of Sugar to ensure the guarantee cane price of \$85 will continue in this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the game plan developed for our recovery would have remained a plan if it were not for the Civil Service. The effort and energy made it reality. We have never cut the salaries despite political pressure from our opponents and we have no plans ever to do so. That is a promise that they can believe. We have some important changes, benefits and reforms announced this evening for civil servants, Sir.

The Job Evaluation Civil Service Remuneration Guideline will be amended to expand the definition or scarce skills to facilitate the inclusion of the payment of retention allowance for skillsets that exist in competitive markets for higher performing staff. Work on this will be finalised as soon as subsequently announced.

As announced in the revised Budget the suspension on the payment of Maritime Location Allowance was lifted while the review of the Rural Allowance was to be undertaken. The review has since been completed from 1st August, 2022, Rural Allowance will be reinstated for eligible civil servants and standardised rates across Ministries and Departments.

School based staff have always had alternative leave arrangements to the wider civil servants given they have always had alternative leave arrangements to the wider civil servants given the need for face to face contacting students and of course they had holidays during the school holidays.

From 1st August, 2022 school-based teaching staff would be allowed three days of annual personal leave with the approval of the Heads of Schools and not Divisional Education Officers because they do have matters to attend to themselves.

Work life balance is not a luxury it is a necessity. Our civil servants are not only civil servants they are wives and husbands. They are mothers and fathers and they need quality time at home.

To align to International Best Practice the amount of annual leave that can be carried into a new leave year within a valid contract period will raise from 10 to 12 days depending on the operational context of the Department or Ministry, flexi hours may be considered in respective Permanent Secretaries.

We recognise the higher demand for our nurses overseas especially in Australia and New Zealand evidenced by their high turnover experienced by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

To address this the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will work with the Fiji Nursing Council to identify additional specialised areas of nursing to allow the Ministry to remunerate the specialisations accordingly. The payment of transport allowance will be prioritised for those in public health care nursing in rural areas.

Nursing quarters will undergo stocktake with the intent to upgrade in the new financial year. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services will also review the position of Ward Assistants and engage additional Ward Assistants to provide support to nurses in hospitals and allow them to focus on actually patient care.

Midwives have been a scarce skill in Fiji for some time. We have taken steps to invest in higher salaries and increase training opportunities to ensure we have enough midwives in the country.

The nature of this work requires midwives to operate on call to assist birthing women after all you cannot predict exactly when your baby will be born.

Mr. Speaker Sir, of course, many of us have children. I have three of them, Prime Minister has many children and many grandchildren, all of us have children or grandchildren and we know this. In order to compensate midwives for their unpredictable and often very late or early hours they are required to serve. We are introducing a call back allowance which essentially compensates midwives for the additional hours they work.

We do not forget our allied health workers. The payment of overtime allowance will be extended to all our professionals in the allied health cadre on Band F. These include dietitians, nutritionists, environmental health officers, physiotherapists, medical laboratory technologists, medical imaging technologists, pharmacists, oral health officers, dental officers and biomedical engineers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our teachers also deserve greater certainty in how they get paid. We acknowledge that the teacher remuneration arrangements have changed a number of times in the past five years which have led to inconsistencies in the ways they are remunerated. Degree level teaching positions have been evaluated Band F, sooner to other positions across the Civil Service.

Currently, 1,295 teachers have upgraded their qualifications to relevant undergraduate degree and move to Band F with an additional 121 applications expected to be processed. From 1 August, 2022, teachers who are eligible to be on Band F will transition to step 3 of Band F. This will also apply to newer graduates with relevant qualifications. This is to allow for some consistencies in the pay of teachers. Teachers on Band D and E on shortage of contracts will be provided with 5 year contracts to allow them time to upgrade their qualifications so they can move up to higher bands and earn themselves a pay rise.

It is our duty to take the lead in building effective, accountable, inclusive institution at all levels. To begin the process, several years ago when our Government prioritised Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) and implemented guidelines based on good government principles and that effort continues.

A new customer service guideline was approved and circulated to all ministries and departments earlier this month for implementation. There are many specific ways and we are asking for a higher level of service the list of which requires that all civil servants refer to the people they serve as Mr, Ms, Mrs, Madam or Sir. As part of the implementation, we launched a customer service feedback line; the 157 toll free number now allows anyone in Fiji to provide feedback or submit a complaint related to customer service they received at any government ministry or department and also service a feedback loop that will contribute to the performance, assessments of staff of the respective Ministries and Departments.

The feedback received on the toll free number will form an announcement next year of the top five service to the ministries and departments. We will not only tell the people where we are doing well in the interest of transparency and accountability, we will also be announcing the poorest performing ministries and departments as it relates to customer service so that the people know exactly where the Government will be focused on making improvements. Civil Service wide training on improving customer service experience has begun and will be incorporated into your induction programmes and our online learning module and we will be available for all civil servants from junior levels to Deputy Secretaries.

Another implementation of tool to measure success and ensure that the customer government feedback loop is working, a mystery shopper scenario will be implemented as a measurement tool. This will involve a small group of people visiting different ministries and departments anonymously to check out the quality of customer care services. They will assess generally how well customers are treated and served by members of the civil service including how long people are left waiting, how thoroughly they assisted and how politely they are spoken to.

Once sufficient based on information collected and used to improve processes, we launch the Customer Service Awards at the ministry and department level and at individual level. Using evidence-based assessment tools these awards will acknowledge the dedication and hard work that Civil Service put in to improve the service to the Fijian public. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to ensure that the civil servants not only serve the people, but make the most effective use possible of the people's resources.

The next financial year Sir, the Ministry of Civil Service will lead a right sizing initiative across the Civil Service. We will start by reviewing vacant positions in the selection of ministries in particular long standing ones and departments identify positions that are not required. These unnecessary positions that have not been filled for a long period of time will be relocated to ministries and departments with more urgent and pertinent staffing needs before the end of the second quarter.

The Ministry of Economy works closely with the Ministry of Civil Service to fund their relocation and right-sizing as it progresses. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this effort essentially ensures that the Civil Service will not become unnecessary bloated and remains as lean and as efficient as possible.

Lastly on the subject of civil service, we will be restoring the 10 percent pay cut we asked of all the Permanent Secretaries throughout the pandemic and any voluntary pay cuts taken by the heads of government-funded agencies from 1st August, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course independent bodies too that voluntarily took a cut, they can have that restored and even backdated depending on the board or the particular commission. The Ministers, Assistant Ministers, MPs will remain with the 25 percent reduced pay cut.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while I will not detail every expenditure by each Ministry or Department in Government - that can be found in the Budget Supplement documents - I will review some important highlights. Sir, number one and most importantly, we are stepping our funding to FICAC. We have uprooted a culture of corruption that has plagued our society since independence. Fiji today is one of the least corrupt countries in the world (do not laugh, do not shake your head when you do not know anything). In the 2005 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) before this Government came into power, Fiji always scored 40 points out of 100 and ranked 55 out of 159 countries, placing us among the middle third of the nations. According to the report, that indicated serious levels of corruption within the country.

In 2021, CPI scored 55 points out of 100, ranked 45 out of the 180 countries for Fiji. Fiji came in to the top third of the countries that scored above 50 points. In another report the global corruption barometer Pacific Report 2021, the corruption and electoral process were amongst the key focus areas, and Fiji was found to run one of the cleanest electoral processes in the Pacific. That is our record and it is backed by credible and impartial analysis – not by those on social media, those who crow about Fiji becoming a more corrupt country under our leadership are those who are the most corrupt of all. Their actions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, speak louder than their politically motivated whingeing.

Two Opposition parliamentarians were recently convicted of obtaining financial advantage through fraudulent conduct. These people broke the law and they were found guilty in a court of law. Did the Opposition or the political opponents condemn their actions? No, in fact they released statements

praising them. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the ugly face of the deep-seeded culture of corruption that remains in Fiji, a culture that prioritises certain personalities over the rule of law; a culture that sees some people as untouchable, above the rest of us and even above justice; a culture that lurks beneath the surface of a just society waiting to rewrite the rules in its favour. If they could even be bothered to pretend to care about democracy and the rule of law, the Opposition and those political opponents outside should have condemned the corruption of its members the minute they were found guilty in an independent court of law. Instead they try to make them out as martyrs, that has become the standard response - no matter how serious the claim, no matter how provable the charges, they do worse than tolerate corruption. They make heroes out of their worst offenders. That should serve as a warning to everyone about what they would do if they ever assume power, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the only thing worse than corrupt individuals are their appeasers - those who stand by and let it happen, so as long as this culture remains, our commitment to root it out will keep ramping up. This Budget funds a national level strategy to strengthen the fight against corruption in Fiji. FICAC has already started the process of creating the necessary framework with the assistance of the United Nation Development Programme and United Nation's Office on Drugs and Crime.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2022-2023 Budget, the Land Transport Authority will be allocated a total of \$22.4 million - \$800,000 specifically for the implementation of new integrated information technology which would enable customers to access more services online, one more step towards the transformation under digitalFIJI. To assist in the payment of loading another fine, the Land Transport Authority will allow individual companies to pursue those who had been fined previously (not the new ones), to pursue a payment plan option in line with strict conditions.

Upon payment of the first instalment, normal transactions will be allowed and the vehicles will be released from any freeze on transaction. This will allow individuals or companies to continue using vehicles for their business purpose and still meet their fine repayment. If they default, they will lose the entire thing. To be clear, of course, as I said this is only for past infractions - this is not the policy moving forward.

In order to better monitor and protect our Fijian roads, there will be restrictions placed on commercial vehicles moving into residential areas. The municipality and the Fiji Roads Authority in collaboration with LTA will determine the gross combined mass and dimension allowed for commercial vehicles entering residential areas. This is less about preventing disruption but these roads simply cannot handle the stress for such heavy vehicles. We find people (just for lunch) taking their overlaid trucks into small streets and they completely damage the roads. The regulations are being amended and will come into effect from 1st August, 2022.

In the 2022-2023 Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Maritime Safety Authority Fiji (MSAF) will be allocated a total of \$7.4 million, of which \$5.9 million is for operations, \$1.5 million for capital expenditure, \$1.1 million is allocated to reconstruct the damaged lighthouse at the Suva Harbour Northeast, Pinder Reef and Beqa Southwest Reef. In order to meet the standards of the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) and keep our coastline safe for vessels, the Authority put forward a proposal of salary increments due to current impediments affecting the organisation's operations and deliverables.

The Authority has suffered operational losses as a result of lack of human resources in various departments, high attrition of senior officers and management, which is a direct result of lower remuneration, insufficient resources and lack of funding for specific activities. Through the 2022-2023 Budget, a 10 percent increment for 51 technical staff, amounting to \$183,000 has been agreed to and provided. The remaining 10 percent to meet the 120 percent median quartile is to be implemented in 2023-2024 financial year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has approved a total budget of \$211,000 for

five individuals to be selected by the Authority to undertake the full two and half year course until they reach the Class III certification.

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces has a total budget for 2022-2023 financial year is \$94.1 million. This is an increase of \$8 million from the Revised 2021-2022 Budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$5 million is allocated to correctly align the Lodging Allowance and Service Allowance to the current basic salary of 2,396 RFMF officers. At the moment, these officers, unfortunately, are being paid allowances based on the 2013 Basic Pay, so it is essential to realign this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$400,000 is also provided for the remote location allowance for the engineers who are engaged to build and maintain rural projects, such as Rotuma Hospital, Kadavu Foot Bridge, Lakeba Suspension Bridge and Bua Lomanikoro Foot Bridge; \$2.3 million is allocated for the renovation and upgrade works at RFMF facilities including renovation upgrade of RFMF infrastructure, construction of new warehouse at QEB, upgrade of logistics support unit complex, upgrade of Sukunaivalu Barracks in Labasa and the upgrade of Nadi Camp.

We are allocating a total of \$50.8 million for Peacekeeping Operations, which is an increase of \$5.5 million from the Revised 2021-2022 Budget. The officers deployed for peacekeeping operations were also paid allowances based on their 2013 Basic Pay rate; \$800,000 is provided to realign the Lodging and Service Allowances for 543 peacekeeping officers on the current pay; \$3.5 million has been allocated to meet salaries and allowances of the peacekeeping officers as aligned to the payroll. Additionally, \$3 million has been allocated for military training and equipment, which will be reimbursed by the United Nations.

The Office of the Auditor-General is allocated \$5.8 million in the 2022-2023 Budget. This is an increase of \$900,000 or \$0.9 million as compared to the Revised 2021-2022 Budget; \$650,000 is to address the backlog of audits. The Office is planning to engage major auditing firms to complete 99 pending audits languishing with the OAG outlined for the 2022-2023 financial year.

Parliament is allocated \$8.6 million in the 2022-2023 Budget. This is an increase of \$1.5 million as compared to the Revised 2021-2022 Budget to cover the operational costs of political offices and the addition of four seats to 55 from the current number of 51 Members.

The Office of the Prime Minister is allocated \$16.9 million in 2022-2023 Budget, an increase of \$2.1 million from the Revised Budget of 2021-2022. The major increase includes an additional \$2.9 million provided to the Department of Immigration. As you know, the Department of Immigration falls under the Prime Minister's Office.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$1.3 is allocated to procure e-passport booklets to improve the security of Fiji's passports. With the opening of our borders, the Department expects to issue 300 passport booklets per day to meet demand and expects to exhaust its supply of 42,000 booklets in the next six months. The e-passport system is up and running and to ensure its effectiveness and continuity without any disruption, the Department is also allocated \$2 million to undertake the disaster recovery for e-passport project. The project will reduce the damage or disruption to the system and allow quick recovery in the event of a disaster that leads to the system failure. It will also act as a backup system to protect the data in the e-passport. This ensures that Fijian passports will get more readily accepted in other countries and hopefully give our Fijian people access to more of what we call "visa on arrival".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Police Force is allocated \$182.6 million, a slight reduction of \$3.2 million from the Revised 2021-2022 Budget, resulting from the near completion of three new police stations - that is why the capital expenditure has come down, in Nadi, Nakasi and Lautoka. Those three stations plus the new station in Nalawa will be allocated a total budget provision of \$10 million, a

reduction of \$14.5 million. This will expand the reach of police protection for Fijians living in the Central and Western Divisions. Crime is changing of course and our policing must change with it. The Force is increasingly focused on preventing cybercrimes and combatting drug trafficking. In order to reform itself to better address these emerging threats, the Force is undergoing a major reform and restructure programme first announced in 2018.

The Force will now continue with phase three of the five-year reform and restructure programme which was endorsed by Cabinet in 2018. The programme was halted for the past two years due to COVID-19 and after, phases one and two were completed at a cost of \$68.3 million. The Force will commend phase three of the RNR with the government providing an additional \$4.2 million for the recruitment of 331 new positions. This includes 289 new recruits, 15 promotions, seven new civilian positions and 20 new government wage earners.

To ensure that Fiji Police Force is fully equipped to provide the best possible service, government will also be providing \$4.9 million for the procurement of uniforms, uniform accessories, clothing and footwear. After some years of focus on constructing new police stations, we are now shifting our focus to improving the condition of the police quarters and posts with an initial allocation of \$1.5 million. The Force is also allocated \$1.2 million under Head 50 to assist the Fijian Elections Office to conduct the 2022 or 2023 General Elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to make Fiji more competitive with other tourist holiday destinations, we are amending the Superyacht Act and reducing the charter fee from US\$55,000 to US\$30,000. We are also amending the definition of superyachts from the minimum length of 24 metres to 18 metres which will mean more super yachts chartering in Fijian waters.

The Ministry of Forestry has been allocated an increased budget of \$17.7 million of which \$3.3 million will be used to facilitate the large-scale planting of trees to continue with Fiji's 30 Million Trees in 15 Years Initiative. Since its inception in 2019, Fiji has put over 12 million new trees in the ground through this commitment. The allocated budget will provide technical support in terms of seed sourcing, seed supply, nursery and silviculture practice training and direct incentives for landowners to establish and manage their own forests.

In line with this objective, \$500,000 has been allocated for research into developing new forest products that can increase economic opportunities for resource owners, cottage industries in the sector. This funding will support in-depth studies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of identified tree species, trial tests, specialised equipment, as well as collaboration and consultation. This is part of the diversification programme for the forestry sector. The Maritime Pine Development Project is intended to provide a return on investment for pine grown decades ago in the maritime islands. Government has allocated \$700,000 to assist resource owners through the provision of appropriate harvesting machines and equipment with the capacity to economically harvest, process and market their pine trees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, specifically, resource owners will be able to use their own timber to build cyclone resilient homes and market the surplus to generate revenue and elevate the standard of living. Fiji of course is committed to the global objective of reducing carbon emissions and enabling carbon trades with protection of the extensive forest resources. The Ministry of Forestry will receive \$350,000, Sir, to complete the National Forest Inventory which is an accounting of Fiji's forest resources and an essential reference for decision-making on the sustainable management of our forests including carbon trading.

Sustainable fisheries are in our fixture of our vision to a bluer Fijian economy. We are steadily introducing sustainable harvesting regimes to manage the health of vulnerable marine species in Fiji. We have lifted the five-year ban on *beche-de-mer* in favour of a set of harvesting window. As we explore

managed harvesting of other species, we are simultaneously strengthening the science behind culturing these and other high-valued species to support sustainable economic sources for coastal communities. The businesses involved in both domestic and export sales, and to our national economy. Specifically, Sir, the sustainable measures for the *beche-de-mer* fishery include allowing only the customary fishing rights owners to be licenced to harvest. Implementing a fair and transparent process for the selection of traders and exporters, allowing only the non-convention on international trade of endangered species listed species to be harvested, setting size limits and limiting the harvesting and trading periods to only two and four months respectively.

Jobs for Nature 2.0 is one of the several initiatives that Government is backing in the area of green jobs. Jobs for Nature 2.0 gives approximately 10,000 Fijians the chance to generate an income while at the same time contributing to mitigating climate change impacts. The project is expected to pay the minimum wage rate to the public, participants who will have the opportunity for short term work on wetlands protection such as mangroves and seagrass planting, restoring waterways, riverbank rehabilitation and coastal bank protection, including vetiver grass, enhancing biodiversity through forest restoration, native tree planting, coral reef protection and planting indigenous fruit trees, et cetera.

There will also be employment opportunities in waste and wastewater management. The Government will also with the concessional funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the World Bank will provide \$7.6 million to back the initiative which involves a variety of stakeholders including the respective ministries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly to run through ways we are making businesses easy in Fiji as we prepare for private sector leverage stage growth, we are leaving no stones unturned to ensure certainty for the private sector.

We recognise that immigration laws and processes need to be continually updated to enable us to keep pace with the rapidly evolving world. We need fast and simple mechanisms that allow us to remain competitive in the investment destination.

To assist with ease of getting specialised expatriates for short-term work assignments or those who want to come and visit businesses and provide consultation services, effective from 1st August, 2022 business visas will be granted on arrival for citizens of certain countries that have visa free entry to Fiji. We will start with Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and United States of America. The business visa on arrival will be valid for 21 days.

We are also modernising aspects of the immigration system to better recognise COVID requirements for entry and removal of red-tapes and additional processes regarding permit processing. Permit conditions will now also apply to persons in *de facto* relationships with them as well as parents and guardians of family members. We are lowering the age of a child for immigration purposes from 21 years to 18 years. We are also looking at introducing new categories of permits and revising the fee structure as charged by the department.

Over the past five years, we stripped away unnecessary requirements and fees for business registration, fast tracked approvals and increased the validity of licences, saving businesses immeasurable time and at least \$3.5 million in direct savings according to the World Bank. The bizFIJI portal contains a simple and consolidated guide on how to start a business and obtain construction permits. Now, we have an important update, Project bizFIJI 2.0 which is led by the Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport, \$9 million has been allocated for the implementation of a centralised online application and approval system for starting a business and obtaining construction permits process.

Over the next 22 months, Sir, we will see the rollout of 25 digital services across 16 different agencies. To ensure seamless online transition for the construction permit acquisition processes, amendments will be embedded with the requirements for qualified persons into the Town and Planning Subdivision Legislation for the first time. Qualified persons such as engineers, architects, surveyors, et cetera will be clearly identified and referenced in law to assist in the streamlining of the registration process. This will lead to improvement in the quality of service delivery plus increase accountability and responsibility of those involved in the construction industry.

The Ministry of Forestry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has implemented online licencing for the export and import of timber and forest products which has reduced turnaround time within 24 hours for approvals. The online application for logging licence has now enabled licences to be issued within 48 hours. This Budget will continue to support the Ministry's ongoing digitalisation transition in support of the sustainable management of our forest resources.

Insurance agents used to apply annually for licences, those agents can now apply for licences for a maximum period of five years. This will be amended through this Budget. The same will go for sand and gravel extraction licences. The terms of fishing licences will now be aligned to those legally allowed for fishing permits which is up to three years upon approval of the customary *iTaukei* fishing rights owners.

We announced our working group with iTLTB, the Ministry of Lands, Department of Town and Country Planning and the Ministry of Economy in the mini-budget or the revised budget to work on improving survey processes. The agencies were provided with additional resources and they have been working diligently in clearing backlogs and reducing inefficient internal processes. As previously indicated on 1st August, 2022, all new surveys of *iTaukei* land can be tracked online. Furthermore, all members of the public from 1st August, 2022 will have free access to the VanuaGIS system for all users; no fee. Anyone can go and check the VanuaGIS, making this invaluable information more accessible to the public.

The Ministry of Lands will also enable chartered approved survey plans to be viewed online via the Vanua View platform and scanned plans will be freely available on the Ministry of Lands website. This expands access to information that is good for investment, good for sustainable development and indeed democratises information.

Roads infrastructure has been the most costly part of developing rural lots and subdivisions and land development costs to meet subdivision design and standard requirements have become a stumbling block for development, especially for ordinary Fijians living in the rural areas. In consultation with the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG), the Fiji Roads Authority will soon finalise specific standards for rural subdivisions, thereby reducing cost in allowing more Fijians to acquire land for housing purposes in deep rural areas.

The financial limit for obtaining tax clearances will be raised from \$5,000 to \$10,000. It was raised from \$2,500 to \$5,000 and now it has gone up to \$10,000. This excludes payment for services. This move will benefit banks, businesses and individuals as it significantly reduces the number of small transactions requiring clearance. Blanket tax clearances are also easily available for larger and more regular transactions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government will increase the FNPF employer and employee contribution from 6.0 percent to 7.0 percent from 1st January, 2023 through 31st December, 2023. For more than a year now, FNPF members' accounts have received contributions at a lower rate. This 1.0 percent reversal for both employers and employees should credit \$40 million to members' accounts. The Government will gradually revert the contribution rates to a total of 18 percent in the

coming years. Any employer who chooses to contribute more than the 7.0 percent statutory mandatory contribution up to 10 percent will be allowed to deduct 300 percent of the employer additional contribution from their taxes and that additional income in the pocket of the employee will be exempt from income tax.

To support female entrepreneurs in MSMEs, we are providing \$1 million to the Fiji Development Bank Women Entrepreneurs Loan Package. The Women Entrepreneurs Loan Package will target women entrepreneurs with registered businesses in operation who require working capital or need to expand their existing business. The package will allow a minimum loan of \$1,000 to a maximum of \$5,000 with a loan term of up to three years which will be available to sole traders, joint ventures and partnership businesses on its own or those that provide services to other industries. The 10 percent equity required for loan packages will be provided through this \$1 million allocation will greatly support female entrepreneurs' access to financing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget is an important opportunity to enact policy. It is not the only opportunity. Our ears are as open to businesses of all size; micro, small, medium and large as they always are and will remain flexible to develop joint solutions to every serious and unforeseen challenge facing our recovery. We will certainly be introducing other legal procedural changes to create most efficient and least bureaucratic environment possible for our businesses to thrive and also our individual citizens to enjoy. Our golden rule will be that every process must serve a purpose other than simply creating a bureaucratic role.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have not played around with taxes through the pandemic and we will not play around with it in this Budget either. We only making two tax changes in this Budget. One for motor vehicles and one to realign the corporate tax rate for international headquarters and companies listed in the stock exchange.

We are keeping our regime lean, mean, streamlined and focussed on making Fiji the region's most comparative investment and business destination, not for one year but over a multi-year period. There will be no changes to the taxes that were removed such as ECAL, STT, Stamp Duty, Departure Tax, the removal of 20 cents fuel levy, the VAT zero-rated items and large scale reduction in custom duty.

Combined these tax cuts will save Fijians around \$600 million per year. These are promised to the private sector that these taxes remain at these low rates or lower for the next three years at least. That is our bond to you because you are must hire, invest and drive this economy. What we ask in return is that you pass these savings on to customers including our visitors.

I know the price of wheat is rising but there is no need, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be charging \$12 for a stubby anywhere in Fiji and some hotels have already started doing that. We need to take a long term approach to sustain profits rather than squeeze people for everything they are worth once they are at our shores.

The Employment Taxation System currently set to expire in 2023 will now be extended until 31st December, 2024. The Scheme provides that 300 percent tax deduction on the amount of any salaries or wages paid to first time employees. If I am a graduate and someone employs me for the first time, they get a 300 percent tax deduction with the wages that is paid to me. A 300 percent tax deduction of the amount of any salary or wages paid to a student for employment before the student's graduation. So, during my university holidays, if I go and work for a company, the salary they pay to me, that company can claim a 300 percent tax deduction. Where the employment forms part of the student's course requirements of a higher education, a 300 percent tax deduction of the amount of salary and wages paid to the student by the employer, is also eligible for that deduction. So if I

am required to do part-time work whilst I am studying, as part of my course again, whoever pays me that can claim 300 percent tax deduction and a 400 percent tax deduction or amount of any salary or wages to a person with disability for a consecutive period of three years. If you employ someone with disability, you get a 400 percent tax deduction, it used to be 300 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a 300 percent tax deduction will also be extended for wages and salaries paid to persons for apprenticeship. If you hire someone as an apprentice, the salary paid to them, you can claim 300 percent from us.

The corporate tax rate applicable to companies relocating their global or regional head office will be increased from 17 percent to 20 percent and this will be effective from tax year 2023.

The 10 percent reduced rate of corporate tax available to companies listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange will only be available for seven years. Companies that have enjoyed the reduced rate for seven years or more will now pay the corporate tax rate at 20 percent in the new financial year. Our commitment is to prevent taxes from becoming a burden on businesses, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That said, a smart tax regime relies on incentives to drive business and consumer behaviour. We are making moves to become a less carbon reliant and more energy secure society. That will not happen overnight, but those steps cannot wait.

We will be enhancing the electric vehicles charging incentive with a lower minimum investment threshold of \$50,000 from \$100,000. The subsidy will be increased from 5 percent to 10 percent on capital expenditure incurred in the development of electric vehicle charging stations. It includes even individuals.

We will zero rate VAT and duty on all electric vehicles and allow accelerated depreciation of 100 percent in the first year. Individuals and businesses that purchase electric motor vehicles will also receive a \$10,000 cash payment from Government towards the purchase of that vehicle. Additionally Mr. Speaker, Sir, companies as I said will enjoy a 100 percent accelerated depreciation. We will also increase the import duty on passenger cars to \$1,000 for second hand passenger cars, import duty on new passenger cars will be increased by 5 percent. These are modest sums. We will also be introducing a luxury vehicle tax of \$10,000 per vehicle for vehicles over 3000cc. A five-year age limit will be imposed on the importation of second hand petrol and diesel powered motor vehicles. This will align with the current five-year age limit on high breed vehicles. The Euro 4 compliance requirement continues.

To help provide alternatives, diesel generators in rural and remote communities and support the rural electrification programme, the duty on Liquefied Petroleum Gas or LPG will be reduced from 4 cents per kilogramme to 2 cents per kilogramme. The reduced duty will be applicable on LPG, supply for energy generation and auto gas only. This will be administered as a drawback facility.

Effective from 1st January, 2023, capital gains exemption on gains made by a person with disposal of shares will be limited to resident individuals and Fijian citizens only. Capital Gains Tax (CGT) will be exempted or repurchased agreements or what we call “repo transactions” administered by the Reserve Bank of Fiji. Extension of project completion time provisions will be incorporated under the standard allowance incentive. The residential housing and development incentive package will be further incentivised as follows. Another tier of incentive will be available with the minimum investment requirement of \$5 million with at least 10 residential lots. There will be no condition on the sale of price and the investor will qualify for 50 percent developer profit exemption. Moreover, they will enjoy customs concessions such as zero duty on the importation of capital goods including capital equipment, plant and machinery and other goods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have one last amendment. The 150 percent tax deduction available to restaurants, taverns, hotels and resorts that hire local artists such as craftsmen, dancers, musicians, people who perform *meke* will be increased from a 150 percent to 300 percent. We want the hotels to hire the people from the villages to come and do *meke*. If they pay them a \$1,000 they can claim \$3,000 from us, if they hire the local band (do not have techno music), hire the local dance groups in the restaurants and resorts, they can claim 300 percent from us from whatever they pay them because we want our talent not only to be showcased and to be shown, but we do not want it to die off.

When we first announced this policy in 2020-2021 Budget during the period when our borders were closed, we had mentioned that the song, "*Gimme Hope Jo'anna*" was a theme song for our present situation and future recovery. I hope in the next financial year, we can hear some renditions of "*I Will Survive*" by the great Gloria Gaynor. Because we have survived my friends, our economy is no longer chained up by pandemic restriction and now we will thrive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the darkest and most uncertain days, you ask us what comes back, what comes next. And we answered by locking in this course for a comeback.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of our honourable Prime Minister who led it, the civil servants who supported it and the Fijians who depended on its success, I am proud to say that our national recovery is the most important promise we have ever kept. This is not a crisis budget, it is a confidence budget because that is what Fiji needs in this moment, neither it is an election Budget. This Government does not need one because we have strong record of recovery and we are proud to run on. We have taken the economy from the depth of its worst crisis to its greatest year ever of record. The COVID-19 put us in the situation, we took ourselves out of it. This Budget is compassionate, it is sensible, it is disciplined, it is the Budget that the nation needs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that our people need, our businesses need and there are recovery needs to sustain itself for years to come.

Inflation is rising, Sir, this Budget mitigates it, especially for those most vulnerable. Our economy is surging, this Budget strengthens it. Our jobs are increasing, this Budget adds to them. Climate events are becoming more devastating, this Budget strengthens our infrastructure. We are realistic about the threats we face, ambitious for our country and our children and optimistic about what can be achieved. This Budget answers the same question we have always asked with honest and vision, what is to come?

And to that great question of our aspiration as a people, your Government is answer is unambiguous - only the best is yet to come, Sir, and I wholeheartedly recommend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Blue Print and this Budget that will guide us in the years to come. Thank you, Sir.

(Acclamation)

[A Bill to appropriate a sum of Three Billion, Three Hundred and Twenty Million, Two Thousand, One Hundred and Eighty Four Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July 2023 (Bill No. 27 of 2022)]

MR. SPEAKER.- In accordance with Standing Order 84(1), the 2022-2023 Appropriation Bill 2022 has now been read for the first time and in accordance with Standing Order 99(3), the Bill will now be listed on the Order Paper for Second Reading on Monday, 25th July, 2022.

2022-2023 BUDGET CONSEQUENTIAL BILLS 2022

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the following Consequential Bills for the 2022-2023 National Budget be considered by Parliament without delay. Before I do that, Sir, I would like to also say that there will be more Bills that we will be tabling as discussed in the Business Committee in the following week.

- (1) Tax Administration (Budget Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 28/2022);
- (2) Income Tax (Budget Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 29/2022);
- (3) Value Added Tax (Budget Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 30/2022);
- (4) Customs (Budget Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 31/2022);
- (5) Customs Tariff (Budget Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 32/2022);
- (6) Excise (Budget Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 33/2022);
- (7) Superyacht Charter (Budget Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 34/2022);
- (8) Tertiary Scholarships and Loans (Budget Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 35/2022);
- (9) Insurance (Budget Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 36/2022);
- (10) Veterinary Surgeons (Budget Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 37/2022); and
- (11) Fisheries (Budget Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 38/2022).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the Consequential Bills –

- (a) must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (b) must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament;
- (c) must be debated and voted upon by Parliament immediately after the vote on the 2022-2023 Appropriation Bill 2022; and
- (d) that the time for the debate be limited to ensure that these Consequential Bills tabled today are debated and voted upon in the sitting of Parliament beginning on Monday, 25th July, 2022.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Are there any Members wishing to take the floor at this stage?

As no Member wishes to take the floor, I give the floor to the honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have nothing further to add as we will be debating this part of the Budget Bill in the following week.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 25th July, 2022, at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting tonight. I trust that all honourable Members will utilise the coming week to prepare well for the Budget debate week, which follows the following week.

On that note, I thank the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development for delivering the National Budget Address. I thank you and I thank you all honourable Members for your forbearance and cooperation, and I thank all those watching tonight's proceedings.

Parliament is now adjourned until Monday, 25th July, 2022 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.02 p.m.